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"I WANT TO KNOW ALL ABOUT MRS. HEATH."

Her Hidden Foe; or, Love At All Odds.

BY ARABELLA SOUTHWORTH.

CHAPTER I.

THE SQUIRE'S LETTER.

SQUIRE RAVENHALL, throwing wide his dressing-room window, humming softly, like a man at peace with himself and all the world, looked



"HOW VERY KIND OF YOU TO COME!"

forth over the sweeping lawns and woods of his own estate, and the view beyond of one of the most lovely bits of woodland scenery in all Eastshire.

It was a bright May morning. A few days' exceptional heat, for the month, had been followed, the previous evening, by a brief though violent thunder-storm. The only sign, however, that now remained of the latter was a superb pile of clouds in the north-east. The sky was of a pure blue, here and there broken by a small, fleecy, drifting fragment of nebulae. The sun shone brilliantly, while a fresh breeze made the lake that was just visible through the trees down in the hollow ripple with tiny wavelets.

"Well," thought the Squire, a hale, handsome-looking man of fifty,

with iron-gray hair and mustache, a fresh complexion, and clear, steady, well-open gray-eyes, "what a lovely morning it is!"

Leaning on the window-sill, and gazing down at the broad gravel terrace beneath, he whistled.

Instantly two handsome Scotch hounds, followed by a Skye terrier, darted from the house, and lifting their muzzles to the Squire, barked in delighted recognition.

Then the Skye, getting on his hind legs, frantically waved his fore paws, while the hounds tore with theirs against the wall beneath the Squire's window.

"Down, Bruce! down, Wallace! Follow Burnie's example, you rogues—look, but don't touch! Adams will be ready to kill you if you knock off the shoots of his pet creepers. There, there! I'm coming!"

As the Squire disappeared, so did the dogs, and before he could well open his bedroom door, there the three were to greet him outside. Having administered a caress to each, the master descended to the morning room, followed by his canine body-guard, who, on his taking his seat at the breakfast-table, each adopted a position most advantageous in their opinion for the receipt of substantial proofs of their master's affection.

The Squire, though not of an exceedingly merry disposition, was not given to sighing, yet he sighed now. The morning was so genially bright that his breakfast table appeared more than ordinarily solitary. After all, it would have been pleasant to have had some one to speak to.

The only other inmate of Ravenhall was Edward Churchill, the Squire's nephew, and, in the young gentleman's belief, as also in society's in general, his presumptive heir.

He seldom put in an appearance at the Squire's early breakfast, save during the hunting season—an absence the uncle hardly regretted; for, to use a common phrase, they did not hit their horses at all well together.

The Squire, having bestowed an installment of future donations upon his canine attendants, drew the letter-bag toward him, and took out its contents.

There were several for Edward Churchill, two betraying a woman's caligraphy—one dashing, large and decided; the other neat, graceful, yet undecided, and bearing the copy-book style still about it.

The Squire indifferently threw them over by his nephew's plate, and inspected his own.

The very first he looked at was also in a woman's hand—striking, elegant writing, with a marked individuality in its style.

"Who the deuce is it from?" muttered the Squire.

Ladies did not favor him with epistles often, and this was quite strange to him. He turned it curiously, this way and that, until his glance rested on the post-mark, "St. Helier's, Jersey."

It but increased his mystification. To his knowledge, he was acquainted with no one there. Finally, he broke the seal, and the mystification at once began to get clear.

The letter itself was not in the same hand as that of the envelope; it was a man's writing, and, though faint and unsteady, seemed familiar to the Squire.

He looked at the conclusion of the last page, and exclaimed, "Good gracious! it's from Martin Heath!"

Then he turned to the first page and read:—

"SEA VIEW VILLA, St. Clement's.
"MY DEAR RAVENHALL:—
"You will be surprised, perhaps a little offended, at once again beholding my writing, after so long and unjustifiable a silence—considering how we were lads together, entered Oxford together, and together had our first 'bump' supper within its classic walls. I feel now, now that we are doomed never again in life to meet, how wrong I have been. Your last letter is lying before me, dated seven years ago. Do you remember it? You had heard that I had been ill, and, with that impulsive generosity which is your nature, wrote to offer sympathy and assistance. I received it as I was on the eve of starting for the south of France, and briefly acknowledged it, promising to write at more length when I reached my destination. I never did write.

"Hardly had I landed at Hieres than a relapse of my malady set in. On recovery, though my will was good, and much as I wished to learn about you, I was physically incapable of the exertion of correspondence.

"My doctors ordered me to Algiers, where I lost my dear wife. Then I was recommended Spain, then Madeira—in fact, Ravenhall, for seven years I have been vainly pursuing health.

"Finally, I was ordered my native air. You know what that means, Ravenhall. A gentle way of saying, 'No hope.' I was to break the journey by a brief residence in this charming island. I shall never leave it. The end has arrived; I feel that I have but a short space on earth to live; my weakness increases daily.

"Death, while it brings me peace and release from a weary life sickness, brings but one anxiety. That is a great one—my daughter, my sweet darling Ianthe, my gentle companion and nurse! Whether you are married, and have children of your own" (the Squire's brow clouded, his lips contracted), "I am unaware, though the natural supposition is that you are and have; then I know, when you look upon your own fair daughters, you will compassionate mine.

"Owing to my traveling for so long, I leave her, my poor Ianthe, utterly alone and friendless, almost a stranger to her own land. Ravenhall, will you be a guardian to my child?

"She is not rich, but I do not leave her penniless. Will you look a little after her, and afford the benefit of your advice to my poor friendless little girl?"

"MARTIN HEATH."

The Squire had read with considerable emotion. He recalled those rather riotous but very mirthful "bump" suppers, and the Oxford days altogether, in which handsome Heath had always been the gayest, lightest-hearted, and a trifle the wildest in an innocent way, and the favorite with all, even the grave Dons, though they shook their heads at times over his mirthful pranks.

Rising, the Squire rung the bell violently; then, crossing to a desk, began filling in a telegram form thus:

"Fear nothing, dear old friend! I follow this immediately. Expect me."

"Tell Hills to saddle a horse—the fleetest," said the Squire to the footman who had answered his summons. "I want this telegram wired without a second's unnecessary delay. Then bid my valet at once pack my portmanteau. I am going to Southampton."

"To Southampton! That's a rather sudden determination, isn't it, sir? Thought you promised old farmer Styles to look over those new acres of his?"

The speaker had sauntered into the room as the footman, with the telegram, quitted it. He was a young man of about five-and-twenty, fair of complexion, and his rather heavy build modified by his height. His features were good; the worst, his mouth, which would have declared the nature of the man, being hidden by a long mustache of a straw hue, dashed strongly with red. His eyes, of a pale brown, were slightly prominent, and of a by no means pleasing expression, a defect concealed by the lids being habitually half-drooped.

Thus Edward Churchill was considered by the fair sex in general as a remarkably handsome man, a fact of which he was anything but ignorant.

"You must carry my apologies to farmer Styles, Edward," replied the Squire, sharing between the three dogs the contents of his plate, for which he had lost all appetite. "Serious and important business necessitates my starting at once for Jersey."

"Jersey!" ejaculated the nephew, raising his lids; then, "Trust there's nothing wrong, sir? You hardly look yourself!"

"I have received sad news respecting an old college friend who was very dear to me. His letter will explain better than I can."

He passed it across the table and Edward Churchill read.

"Humph! Like the world—writes when he wants something," he remarked, in conclusion.

"Then unlike Martin Heath," put in the Squire, somewhat sharply—"an upright, high-minded man, generous to a fault, he would give the coat off his back to serve a friend."

"You intend to go to Jersey, sir, to see the young lady, Ianthe—pretty name—through her difficulties, and comfortably settled, as Mr. Heath requests?"

"I am going to Jersey, to once again see

my old friend, and to bring his poor child back with me here."

"Here, sir?"

"Yes, here. Henceforth, Edward, this will be Ianthe Heath's home, if she will accept it," replied the Squire. "She will lose a good father. As far as I am capable, I will supply his place. I suppose you see no objection?"

"I, sir? How could I? Of course, none in the least!" answered the nephew, quickly.

But his brow contracted, for he, in his own secret heart, did see a very great objection. Ravenhall was not entailed, and the Squire could will it as he pleased.

"Her father's nurse!" he reflected. "I trust she's some strait-laced, tract-giving, plain dowdy."

Then it occurred to him to inquire the girl's age.

"I have been thinking of that," remarked the Squire. "After quitting college I learned about as little of poor Heath's life for some years as he did of mine. But I recollect, in the year 185—meeting Dick Sadgrove, a mutual friend, at the club in St. James's when he told me Heath was married. So, possibly, his daughter might now be about sixteen or seventeen."

"A girl!" put in Edward Churchill, with an imperceptible shrug, as he began to look carelessly at his letters. "Why, sir, you'll have to send her to school, or get masters!"

"If she require masters, she shall have them," was the response.

After that, silence ensued. The Squire crossed to the desk, and Edward Churchill mechanically, his mind being engrossed yet by Ianthe Heath's descent upon Ravenhall, took up his letters. He gave them but a cursory glance until he came to the one with the dashing writing. He smiled, and was about to break the seal, when he noticed his other female correspondent's epistle. A frown took the place of the smile, and, crushing the letter in his hand, he thrust it unopened into his pocket.

For a moment he seemed hesitating whether to open the rest, but finally placed them all in his pocket, hurriedly concluded his breakfast; then, rising, approached the window, after taking his hat from a side-table.

"What time do you leave Ravenhall, uncle?" he inquired.

"I find that if I start by the 1.50 train I shall reach Southampton in good time for the mail-packet," replied the Squire. "Therefore, after all, I can ride over to farmer Styles's."

"I'm not sorry, sir, to confess the truth, for I had half an engagement this morning."

"With the charming widow?" remarked the Squire, dryly. "You go there very frequently. Have a care. Handsome women of forty are dangerous."

"You scarcely find her so, uncle," said the nephew, with a laugh; "though not flattering for me to confess, I believe Mrs. Mortimer admires no man like she does you, while you—"

"Prove an exception to the masculine rule here, and dislike her," rejoined the Squire, quietly.

"Why, excuse me, sir, must be a puzzle to yourself."

"As there are elective affinities, so are there elective antipathies. I dislike and mistrust Mrs. Mortimer; and when Ianthe Heath is an inmate here, shall forbid her to form more than a passing acquaintance with the widow."

"That's rather unjust. Mrs. Mortimer, who is very handsome—"

"In her style, which is not mine. To use a vulgar phrase, she cannot for real beauty hold a candle to Mary Blair. By the way," proceeded the Squire, fastening down an envelope, and not perceiving the color that had suddenly spread over his companion's cheek, "has her father got any nearer perfecting his invention, by which mankind is to travel at twice the rate they do now, by half the power of steam force? The man, I fear, will end in a mad-house."

"If he doesn't blow himself up before," sneered the nephew.

"I hope that pretty daughter of his will be suitably married first. You will be back, Edward, before I leave?"

"I shall return for luncheon."

As, stepping through the window, he strolled leisurely across the lawn, the Squire, resting on his desk, looked thoughtfully after him.

"He's my own sister's son," he muttered; "and yet I always feel there is something strangely antagonistic between us. One thing, he is selfish, and, I fear, rather wild still. The fault may, in a measure, be mine. Fifty is not always right in its judgment of twenty-five. If he were to wed and settle down, I dare say he would make a very respectable member of society. I wonder he has never thought of marriage. His is just the nature that loves early. At one time I feared the widow would seek to hook him, having failed to land me." And the Squire broke into an amused laugh. "She played her cards too openly. She let me see her hand, and, discovering that I saw it, favored me with her secret hatred, though she likes me so very much. No, Ted's safe, being only my heir by my will, and the widow would land a gold-fish."

He paused awhile, then murmured: "I wonder what kind of a girl is Ianthe Heath? If Ted should happen to like her—"

And the Squire's thoughts grew busy in building air castles, which the future was to scatter to the four winds, or render substantial tenements.

Meanwhile, Edward Churchill no sooner was beyond sight of the house than, taking out the crushed letter, he opened, read it, and again frowning, crushed it a second time in his hand.

"Confound it! What does she mean by writing? Does she think we can always be meeting?" he muttered. "I might as well be tied to her apron-string."

Swinging half round, he altered his course, and left the Ravenhall grounds by a different gate than that he had intended.

After a quarter of an hour's quick walking, making his way through a tangled copse, he reached a retired portion of the river, thickly overhung by willows.

Beneath one, which almost concealed her, was a young girl of exceeding beauty, enhanced, rather than decreased, by her plain attire.

She leaned thoughtfully against the tree, watching some floating leaves eagerly, as if they contained her destiny.

At the sound of the creaking boughs, she looked up, then sprung quickly forward.

"Ah, Edward!" she exclaimed; "you have come?"

"Yes; I've come," he responded, shortly.

"Whatever made you write, Mary?"

"Because I had not seen you for a week," she smiled, placing her hand fondly on his arm. "And, dear husband, I was getting so—so weary!"

CHAPTER II.

THE SQUIRE TAKES A VOW.

THE morning was bright and exhilarating when the mail steamer in which the Squire was a passenger, rounding Noirmont Point, came in sight of St. Aubin's Bay, and finally moved up alongside Victoria Pier, which was crowded by Jersey residents, half-pay officers, and half-pay widows.

The passage had been a fine one. The Squire had felt no ill-effect from it, and now hastened ashore.

Making his way through the crowd of men who were urging the superior attractions of the Royal Hotel, Brea's Boarding House, the Golden Apple, and others, he entered one of the flys waiting, and gave the direction—Sea View Villa, St. Clement's.

Anxious as he was, the Squire could not but be struck by the charming island—its forts, the quaint, irregular row of houses forming Havre des Pas, and the firm, golden sands. Five minutes later, the fly was traversing the St. Clement's road, and not five minutes after had halted before a detached house, standing a little back in a garden, upon the stucco front

of which was the name—Sea View Villa. The Squire, as he looked, dropped back on his seat, a disappointment at his heart.

"Too late!" he muttered. "The poor, poor girl!"

Alighting, bidding the flyman wait, approaching the villa, he knocked. The door was opened by a neat little servant.

"Mr. Heath—" began the Squire.

"Oh, sir, he—" And dear Miss Heath—oh, sir! (sob.) "P'r'aps, sir," (sob), "you're the gentleman as sent the telegraph, and who she's been expecting?"

"I am," answered the Squire. "Take my card to her, my good girl."

The maid, showing him into a parlor, ascended to the upper floor. The Squire walked to the window.

He regretted not having been in time to see Martin Heath, and was rather embarrassed at his position as guardian to a young girl who was a perfect stranger to him. What should he say if she saw him—what do? He grew more anxious every moment. He pictured his ward a slim, fair, pretty, delicate girl, who would be unable to speak for tears.

"Poor little thing!" he reflected; "how shall I comfort her? I'm so strange at this kind of thing."

Then he was aware the door had opened, and there was the swirl of a soft dress. The Squire turned and halted, surprised, as he looked upon Ianthe Heath.

How rarely do the pictures of our imagination come near the truth, and how greatly are we astonished that it should be so!

Squire Ravenhall beheld before him, not a child, but a woman, tall, graceful, queenly of stature, dark, with features firmly and exquisitely molded, and large lustrous eyes that, in their beautiful depths, showed that their owner had learnt the sad experience of anxiety, sorrow. Never had the Squire beheld a face so handsome, and at the same time so womanly gentle.

"How good—how kind—how very kind of you to come!" murmured Ianthe, in a low tone, advancing, her two long slender hands extended. "Would that"—and her lips quivered—"I were not the only one, Mr. Ravenhall, to thank you!"

"Would, my dear young friend," responded the Squire, with emotion, as he pressed the small hands in his, "that I could have been quicker, or death slower! But your father got my telegram?"

"He did. Your name, Mr. Ravenhall, has been constantly on his lips. I cannot describe to you the anxiety with which he awaited your reply."

"I trust he never doubted me?" remarked the Squire softly.

"Never—never! When your telegram arrived his look brightened, as it used to in the old days when he was well and happy. Drawing me down to his pillow, he whispered, 'My darling, I fear nothing now. I do not leave you alone. In trouble, or doubt, you will have a good man to consult.'"

The Squire turned toward the window, and drew forth his kerchief.

Ianthe had related her father's words with a quiet simplicity that was deeply touching. Steadying her voice, which had failed her, she added, "For that happiness which you gave him, Mr. Ravenhall, I shall hold myself your debtor for life."

"Would that I could have done more!" remarked the Squire, again taking her hand. "Would that I could have told him how gladly I accept the trust he has confided to me!"

"I will endeavor not much to trouble you," said Ianthe, trying to smile. "Only of some things I am so ignorant. My income is sufficient for my need, and it was my dear father's thought that you would kindly advise me as to my future."

"Had he formed any plans for you, Miss Heath?"

"Yes; that I should try to find some nice, respectable family with whom I could live—"

"Miss Heath," put in the Squire, "that family, I trust, is already found. There is a roof and welcome waiting for you in England. As my ward, my dear old friend's child, you shall have no other home than Ravenhall. I ask but one return. I am wifeless, childless; let me take Martin Heath's place. Let me be to you as a father."

Ianthe's lovely eyes looked bewilderingly into his. Then, as she read there the generous sincerity that actuated the speech, they suffused with tears, and she murmured, "Oh, this is too much! What can I say? How thank you? How ever show my gratitude for such generosity to me, a stranger?"

"Every friendship must have a beginning," said the Squire.

As he spoke, he gently rested his hand on the girl's bowed head. Ianthe, removing it, kissed it gratefully. Her heart was too full for speech.

What was it in the touch of her lips, that caused the Squire so violently to start, the color to quit his cheeks, and to suddenly avert his eyes?

Had her attitude and his recalled some sad memory of the never-to-be-buried past?

In any case, could Edward Churchill have seen and heard, it would hardly have rendered him at ease in mind.

The Squire entered upon his office of guardian at once, taking all trouble and responsibility off Ianthe's hands. It was a great relief to her. She grieved for her father much, but Squire Ravenhall's presence was a great comfort to her. His age, his appearance, naturally won confidence, reliance; his tender consideration respect, nay, affection; while the more the Squire saw of his beautiful ward, the more he felt a certain void in his life was being rapidly and pleasantly filled. If he had had such a child, he would have been devoted to her. Why not, then, equally love this his adopted daughter?

How satisfactory it would be were his nephew to love Ianthe, and they should succeed to Ravenhall together, occurred to him.

"Who can tell?" he soliloquized, pacing the sands, one evening, before the villa, the only other sounds beside his own tread being the soft-breaking waves and the sand shrimps hopping in myriads about his feet. "She is friendless and alone, while there is no denying that Ted is handsome. Twenty-two—just the age." And the Squire turned toward the lighted parlor window wherein he knew Ianthe was seated.

She was so, her thoughts far away in a sunnier land, where had happened one of the most pleasant episodes of her life. Ah, how brief it had been!

The Squire knew, by her own confession, that she was friendless. He had asked if there was any one she would like to be informed of Martin Heath's death, or to attend his funeral.

"Thank you, no," she replied, sadly. "I have no relations, and, owing to our moving so often from one place to another, we made few friends—none whom I need inform."

"We will soon have friends enough in Eastshire. It's a pretty and a sociable place," he rejoined, pleasantly, noting the faint color that rose to her cheek, and attributing it to a sensitive feeling at her loneliness.

As soon as free to leave, guardian and ward quitted the island for England.

It was late before they arrived, and Ianthe was much fatigued. The Squire led her through the hall into the pleasant dining-room, where, taking her hands, and lightly touching her forehead with his lips, he said, gayly, "Welcome home, my child."

Then turning to Edward Churchill, who stood there looking on, with that uneasiness yet about him, added, "Ianthe, this is my nephew. You will, I trust, be the best of friends."

"Indeed, I hope so!" smiled Ianthe, gazing not unadmirably on the handsome young man before her, to whom she extended her hand.

"It shall be my endeavor to prevent Miss

Heath altering that hope," responded the gentleman; adding within himself as he gazed upon the new guest's tall, graceful figure, clad in sables that enhanced the dazzling clearness of her complexion, "What a splendid woman! Beats the widow hollow! Now I wonder if it's my destiny to like or hate her? Has she brought peace or war? That, I fancy, rests with the governor. He seems remarkably sweet on her just at present."

That same evening, at about sunset, an hour after the boat had arrived at Jersey, from St. Malo, a man of about eighty-and-twenty, handsome, with fair and clearly cut features, in figure, carriage and dress a gentleman, stopped at the gate of the Sea View Villa. After inspecting it a moment, he muttered, "I'm sure that fellow at the post-office said there was only one Heath in the island, and that they lived at Sea View Villa, St. Clement's. This is St. Clement's, and this is Sea View Villa."

He entered the garden and knocked.

The same neat maid answered him.

"Mr. and Miss Heath did live here, sir. But the poor gentleman died, and was buried yesterday."

The stranger was overcome by the suddenness of the intelligence. "Poor Ianthe!" he thought; then said, "Where is Miss Heath now?"

"A gentleman, an old friend of Mr. Heath's, I think, sir, came over from England to her in her trouble, and she's gone back with him today."

"How glad I am that she had some one with her—some one to take care of her," thought the stranger. "Could you oblige me with Miss Heath's address? I, too, am a friend."

"I don't quite recollect it, sir; but, if you'll wait, I'll ask missis."

Returning, the maid handed the stranger a slip of paper.

The "missis" had kindly written it down. With earnest thanks, the stranger hurried away, and crossed the road to the sands. Ianthe Heath's loss had affected him much.

"Oh, if I could only have arrived a week sooner," he reflected. Then he looked at the paper and read, "Aubrey Ravenhall, Esq., Ravenhall, Eastshire."

The address was evidently another and a severer blow to the stranger. He reeled beneath it. Then, his brow darkening, he exclaimed through his set teeth, "Ianthe beneath his roof! Then may I renounce all hope of ever meeting her again, for not even for her would I cross his threshold!"

Before dawn, however, the stranger, Mark Glendenning, had changed his mind. Ravenhall was not all Eastshire, and to visit the county was neither doing service to nor receiving service from the Squire.

"To any other spot than Ravenhall I have as much right as he," reflected the young man. "Should we by chance meet, it will be as strangers."

So, Mark Glendenning was a passenger in the Southampton boat next morning.

CHAPTER III.

IANTHE MAKES A DANGEROUS ENEMY.

MRS. HAMILTON was a tall, stout, handsome woman of a little over forty. She was a blonde, vivacious and witty. A woman with a quick discernment of character, and who could skillfully adapt her tone and manner to any she might hold in conversation.

She dressed in taste, though a trifle floridly, as is the case sometimes with large women. With the opposite sex she was a favorite, for she could flatter judiciously.

She gave nice little parties in her pretty rooms, was an excellent hostess, with just that suspicion of Bohemianism which made her reunions always a success. She had a nice little property, had traveled, and seen much society.

One morning, nearly a week after Ianthe Heath's arrival at Ravenhall, Mrs. Mortimer,

attired in a morning toilet of blue cashmere, trimmed with old lace, sat in her tiny boudoir, opening onto the garden, arranging with her soft, white fingers various colored wools for some tapestry work. The sound of horses' hoofs on the road caused her to look up. She smiled on recognizing Edward Churchill.

"Coming here, of course," she thought. "Well, if I failed to fascinate the Squire, I have succeeded in obtaining the friendship of the nephew. Not quite flattering, considering the uncle is a sensible, worthy man; and the other—well, might be any thing not worthy if his brain were not too heavy to plan. Here he comes!"

She had heard the gate click, and knew her guest, as usual, had hitched his bridle to the gate-post.

Looking up, with a smile, she called: "Do not trouble to go round; come this way, Mr. Churchill. You are too old a friend to stand on ceremony. Shall I not ring for Robert to take Whitethorn to the stables?"

"No, many thanks. My visit must be a short one," he replied, stepping into the room, and shaking the widow's hand—"unfortunately," he added.

"Unfortunately, indeed! I was just thinking of you. You know the saying, 'Speak of angels.'"

"I fear, a fallen angel, in my case, Mrs. Mortimer," laughed the visitor, taking his place on an ottoman near her.

"Well,"—with a shrug of her well-formed shoulders—"you are aware there is another version? But we're losing time, and I have been so anxious to see you."

"Honored, I'm sure!" remarked Edward Churchill, balancing his well-brushed hat on his gloved hand. "May I ask why?"

"Why?—a woman's curiosity, of course! I want to know all about Miss Heath. I'm told she is lovely. Is she?"

"Very."

"Then, as a natural sequence, you are already over head and ears in love with her, and have no objection to the increase in the Ravenhall establishment?"

"Humph! I don't know about that," replied Edward Churchill, dryly. "That's as it may turn out. The Squire is a great deal too fond of her to suit my book."

"Gracious! you do not mean that he would give Ravenhall a mistress?" cried the widow, dropping her wools.

"Marry her—he?" exclaimed the guest, bursting into a loud, amused laugh. "No, indeed; though it's a droll idea; the Squire is not a marrying man."

"Don't be so sure of that, my friend," remarked the widow, slowly nodding her head. "Gentlemen of fifty do, at times, very foolish acts. Trust me, they are quite as dangerous as widows."

"And are widows dangerous?"

"A cynical world so reports them. But the Squire and Miss Heath? I am all ears."

"Well, it isn't your suggestion that I fear!"

"Then what do you?—that is, if I may hear?"

"Well, I don't mind telling you, Mrs. Mortimer," replied Edward Churchill, balancing his hat now by the brim, and looking gravely into it. "I know I may trust you. And you are the only person living in whom I would confide."

"Thanks! I shall not take that as flattery, but earnest, and prove myself worthy of your confidence," said the widow. "Go on."

"Then the matter lies in this fashion. Though I consider myself the governor's heir, he never has right-down acknowledged me in that light; so, as I have not the slightest legal claim to Ravenhall, he can leave it to anybody he pleases. Now, you see, Miss Heath has come here as his adopted daughter; he treats her as one—a great deal more like one than he ever treated me as a son."

"I have heard," put in the widow, "that your horses do not always run easily together."

"That's just it. If the Squire gets to love

Ianthe Heath really as a daughter, to say the least, he'll leave her a pretty large share out of the estate, if he doesn't leave her all, and merely an income to me."

"Were there any danger of that," remarked the widow, quietly, "surely, Mr. Churchill, you have the remedy in your own hands?"

"How so?" he inquired, curiously.

"Why, marry Ianthe Heath yourself."

A startled expression came over the listener, followed by one of slight confusion. His color came and went, his eyes were again fixed on his hat, as he rejoined, "Ah! I wish I could!"

"And why couldn't you? To a handsome man like you," said the widow, with her touch of Bohemianism, "all things in the way of feminine conquest should be possible."

He looked at her as she bent over her wools, paused, pulled his mustache, then added, gloomily, "Ah, but that isn't possible!"

The widow, struck by the tone, bent her gaze, with sharp, sudden scrutiny, upon him. She was a woman who had seen something of the seamy side of the world, and believed that she understood her visitor.

"I think I comprehend," she said. "Tut! what you men consider obstacles may not always be so, or may be got over with a little trouble. In some cases a woman's advice is invaluable. I do not seek your confidence, Mr. Churchill, though I should respect it as a sacred trust, and in the true spirit of a friend, would give you my advice and assistance."

"You are very good, he rejoined, with a nervous laugh, "but I haven't said that I had a confidence to make."

"True. I was judging from your manner," remarked the widow quietly. "Pardon me. Still the 'isn't possible' yet remains to me a mystery."

She resumed the sorting her wools. Edward Churchill, glancing furtively toward her, observed that she looked grave, that her brow was slightly contracted. He really liked and believed in the widow, who had great influence over young men, who, while admiring, also felt confidence in her power to advise.

"I hope I have not offended you?" he said.

"Offended me!" smiled Mrs. Mortimer, her brows raised. "Good gracious, no! What made you think that?"

"You looked so serious."

"Did I?" remarked the widow innocently.

"Well, I was serious for I was thinking of a serious matter. You have placed your position, Mr. Churchill, in quite a new light to me."

"How do you mean, Mrs. Mortimer?"

"Why, in regard to Miss Heath. You will excuse me if I take the liberty of an old friend, and speak my opinion frankly?"

"I should be thankful if you would," he rejoined, with fervor.

"Then I am anxious about you. No one knows so well as a woman the influence of a woman, especially when the lady is young and handsome, and the subject worked upon middle-aged, not to say elderly. I always thought Ravenhall entailed."

"That's the worst of it—it is not. Also, you see, I don't bear even the name—and the Churchills were never favorites of the Squire's."

"Humph!" murmured the widow, reflectively. "How vexing these disturbing influences are! Everything was going on so nicely until Miss Heath's arrival. Mind, I don't mean to accuse her of design. She may be as innocent of greed as possible, but she can't help her youth, her beauty, and the sentiment that hangs around her position—they are her weapons, and must be, despite herself."

"Yes; you're right, Mrs. Mortimer," broke in Edward Churchill. "I don't believe Ianthe Heath knowingly makes use of them, but she can't help it. Already she's everything to the governor. He seems another man in these few days. He rides, drives, visits with her; does nothing without telling her; leaves everything to her. Yes, hang it!"—and, starting up, he crossed to the window—"she's as good as mistress of Ravenhall already. If it's like this now, what will it be in the end?"

"I saw all this at your first words," said the widow, quietly, but furtively watching her guest as he stood against the framework of the window, his look turned to the floor, his hand pulling his mustache. It was a handsome, but a slightly heavy, selfish countenance. "Hence my marriage suggestion, which, however, you say is impossible."

"Utterly."

"Which means that you care for some one better. Oh, love, what sacrifices we make for you!"

"It must be a strong love indeed to cause a fellow to let slip such an estate and property as Ravenhall."

"Then you're not in love? You would wed Miss Heath to-morrow, if—if it were possible?"

"Ah, that I would!" he answered.

The widow paused. He looked at her doubtfully. His lips opened once or twice to speak, but he said nothing.

Rising and approaching him, Mrs. Mortimer said, gravely, "Listen to me, Edward Churchill. Your position is very serious. I see it in your manner more than your words. Can nothing be done? Will you trust me, confide in me? I am not devoid of intellect; I will help you if I can. You must not lose Ravenhall without an effort to retain it."

He looked at her, still playing with his mustache, nervously.

"I'd like to trust you—I know I might, safely enough—you'd never betray my confidence. Still—"

"You do not know how to begin?" smiled the widow encouragingly, putting her hand on his arm. "Let me use my woman's skill, and guess. You have got tangled in some foolish love affair, of which you have repented, but honor—"

"It is worse than that!" he broke in, not looking at her.

"Worse?"

"Yes, a hundred times. Mind, you have promised to keep my secret—I am already married, Mrs. Mortimer! There—the cat is out of the bag!"

"Married! You!" cried the widow; then, in surprise, stepping back, she resumed her seat on the couch.

"Yes," he rejoined, sullenly; "that's a difficulty I don't think even your skill can get me out of."

She did not answer at once, only looked at him; reading him carefully. Then she said, quietly, "I don't know. Come, sit down and tell me all about it. Recollect, our doctors and lawyers must be as our confessors; we must hide nothing from them if we really expect their aid."

The calm, self-reliant tones had such a ring of encouragement and authority in them, that Edward Churchill, having made the first plunge, never thought of disobeying them. Then and there he passively surrendered himself into the widow's hands. He sat down near her.

"Of course, you have committed the act of a madman, and now repent," she began. "Of course, too, she who has drawn you into trouble is pretty, but beneath you in birth, or you would not try to conceal your union?"

"That's true. If beauty were an excuse for my folly, I had it. She's the prettiest girl in all Eastshire."

"You don't mean Mary Blair?" cried the widow.

"I do. You've hit it."

"Not wonderful with such a clew. The daughter of crazy Blair, the blacksmith! Love her you might; but however in your position did you come to marry her?"

"Because I loved her—because at the moment I would have done anything to make her mine."

"Do you love her as ardently now?"

"Is it likely?" he rejoined, with a short, irritable laugh. "I'm not the first man who has committed a folly and repented of it."

"Not by hundreds," remarked the widow,

dryly. "Who knows of your marriage but yourselves, may I ask?"

"Only the fellow who married us. It was all done quite hurriedly. I'll tell you the whole affair."

"Mary Blair, with all her simplicity, knew well how to take care of herself," smiled the widow, after she had listened. "She was firm; you were weak. But you have not told me how you were married."

"Just at that time a fellow was staying with me from Oxford. He hadn't taken orders, or hadn't got a living—a half-fledged parson, in fact, though I didn't tell Mary Blair so—and he performed the ceremony for us."

"Then in my opinion, you may be safe."

"In what way?" he asked, glancing up quickly.

"In this. Should necessity occur—the threatened loss of Ravenhall through your being tied to this designing piece of simplicity, for instance—in my opinion legally it might be proved no marriage."

"Do you really think that?" he asked eagerly.

"I do," replied the widow, confidently. "At least, it would be wise to obtain legal opinion. I should advise you to do that. Think over it, and watch how matters progress at Ravenhall. I should like much to see Miss Heath."

"Why not do so? Let me introduce you!" exclaimed Edward Churchill, consulting his watch. "In half an hour I have promised to meet them—that is, her and the governor—at the cross-roads. Are you not riding or driving this morning? You might go in in that direction. I should be pleased to escort you thus far."

"Thanks; I will do so," answered Mrs. Mortimer, rising with alacrity. "Though a woman, you shall see I can make a rapid toilet."

The widow was as good as her word. She descended, both elegantly and carefully attired, just as her pony-carriage, with its attendant tiny groom, appeared at the gate.

Edward Churchill handed her in; then mounting, rode by her side along the shady way to where the four roads met. That from Ravenhall and that from Greenbank Villa formed two sides, as it were, of an angle. As the pony-carriage party reached the place of rendezvous, the Squire and Ianthe on horseback neared it also. Abruptly they met. Had the Squire desired to avoid an introduction, it would have been impossible without downright rudeness.

He raised his hat. At the same moment Ianthe looked surprised, and, with cold hauteur, slightly backed her horse.

Edward Churchill, failing to observe it, said, "Miss Heath, allow me the pleasure of introducing you to Mrs. Mortimer."

The widow, looking at the girl straight, started; then, with a charming smile, leaning forward, said, "I think Miss Heath and I have met before. We are old friends."

"I beg your pardon, madam," responded Ianthe, icily. "I believe we have met but once, then were not introduced. We are not even acquaintances."

Ending with a slight inclination, she moved her horse on. The Squire followed her.

"You know Mrs. Mortimer, Ianthe," he said.

"As you heard me say, sir, we met but once, at the house of a mutual acquaintance. On dear papa's finding that she was one of the guests, he retired as early as he could. She was not a person whose society he would allow me to be in. Does she reside here?"

"Yes. She is a widow."

"Is she? In Paris her husband was alive, but she was divorced."

"Was it she who filed the petition?" inquired the Squire, curiously.

"No, sir; her husband."

"You know Miss Heath?" had also asked Edward Churchill of Mrs. Mortimer, who, after one fierce bite of the lip, had recovered composure.

"Yes; we met once, at a mutual friend's, in Paris, where—mind, secret for secret—I fancy I deeply offended her by quite innocently accepting the attentions of a gentleman who, unknown to me, had deserted her colors for mine. But I am glad we did meet, for I now can express a better opinion upon your affairs."

"And that?"

"Have a care—be on your guard! Beneath that calm look, which is a mask, she is dangerous. Now go," laughing gayly, "or she will think that I am robbing her of you too!"

Shaking the reins, she went quickly on, and her looks grew hard and cruel beneath her veil as she proceeded.

"So, Ianthe Heath," she muttered, through her set teeth, "you are the daughter of that stuck-up Mr. Heath, who found the air of my society too noxious for his child to breathe! I have never spoken to you, but no woman have I so intensely hated! I have often wondered whether we should ever again cross each other's path. Fate has willed yes; and now, in revenge for that insult long ago, I'll ruin you! It is no empty threat, for I believe Edward Churchill has made it an easy matter. We shall see!"

CHAPTER IV.

EDWARD CHURCHILL'S FEARS ARE CONFIRMED.

IANTHE HEATH was more than pleased—she was most gratefully thankful for her new home. For the first time since childhood she knew what it was to be taken care of. Even before her mother's death she had been her father's constant attendant and nurse, and since had never quitted him.

The bright, sunny period of youth, that goes like a summer's day, had been passed by her beside the sick man's couch—passed readily, without complaint. Indeed, Ianthe was not conscious of any self-sacrifice. No inducement would have won her from her duty. To her her father was everything. His memory would be sacred to her, but she was human, and the luxurious ease and comfort of Ravenhall, where every care was taken off her hands, could not but have their effect.

Her spirits rose, despite herself. The pallor of her cheek gave place to a delicate, healthful bloom. As Edward Churchill watched, he grew more afraid of her, using his own term, "cutting him out with the Squire," while on the other hand, he upbraided himself a hundred times for having been led into that secret marriage. If it were *not* legal, after all, and he could wed Ianthe? Then he'd be certain of Ravenhall, and the Squire's approval too. The idea never seemed to occur whether Ianthe Heath would marry him.

The thought respecting the legality of his marriage with Mary Blair had never been out of his mind since it had been put there by Mrs. Mortimer. He was pondering over it on the following morning as he smoked a cigar on the terrace, and the Squire joined him.

"Where is Miss Heath, sir?" inquired the nephew, throwing away his cigar.

"Getting her hat. I have shown her some of the curiosities of Eastshire," laughed the Squire. "I am now going to exhibit to her another in the person of Crazy Blair. Will you go with us?"

"I am sorry, but I promised Thornton Young to be with him by eleven," answered Edward Churchill, instantly inventing an appointment. "I might meet you after. I will if I can."

"That's right; do so," the Squire rejoined, then added, somewhat abruptly, as he rearranged a trailing plant in one of the stone vases with his cane, "By the way, what is your opinion of Ianthe? You have had a week to judge."

"She is beautiful, and in every way admirable!"

"I am glad we agree," proceeded the Squire. "For my part, were I a younger man I should strive to woo and win her!"

Edward Churchill looked at the speaker sus-

piciously. Was this breaking the ice? Could the Squire be entertaining ideas of matrimony?

Squire Ravenhall saw the glance, and read it. First he laughed, then looked serious.

"Don't fear, Ted; I shall not be a rival to him who would win Ianthe. But listen to me. Stay; come a little way from the windows. There, that will do. Now tell me, am I wrong in thinking that Ianthe Heath has made an impression on you?"

What could he say? He prevaricated.

"Could one so beautiful fail to do that?"

"Exactly! Well, impressions lead to warm feelings at times, eh?" He paused, wishing evidently his nephew to take up the thread.

Edward Churchill merely remarked, "I believe so, uncle."

The Squire looked at him as he stood, stamping with his heel at a blue pebble in the path. He certainly was handsome.

"Ted," he exclaimed, finally, "tell me frankly. I do not—say do you—the days are early—but could you love Ianthe?"

A home question, truly. He replied to it after a space by another question.

"Will you first tell me, sir, would it annoy or please you if I could?"

"Please me beyond all things!" was the prompt answer. "It is thus. Ianthe is my adopted daughter. I have vowed to be a father to her. My knowledge of her, the affection she has aroused in me, have strengthened that vow. On her marriage I shall provide her portion; on my death I shall provide for her as a daughter of my house. Now, I do not wish to sell Ravenhall. I do not wish to divide the estate. Also, Ted, I shall leave you well provided for; but should you love and wed Ianthe, then all difficulties and divisions would be prevented. You would share the place as man and wife. I think it just to let you know this," proceeded the Squire, in his manly, ringing tones, "for though you may not have deemed yourself so, I having said or done nothing to lead you to that belief, I imagine that society looks on you as my heir."

Edward Churchill's lips were white beneath his mustache.

His suspicions were correct then. Ianthe Heath had ousted him. He must forego Ravenhall, or marry her! And how about Mary Blair?

"Society has considered me your heir, sir," he remarked, with an effort at a laugh, "believing that you had no other, I being next of kin."

"Society has no business to meddle with my affairs," rejoined the Squire, coldly. "If it chooses to do so, it is not mine to set it right. I offered you an income and a home at Ravenhall. What more I may do rests with me."

"Indeed, uncle, do not class me with society," broke in the nephew, with a laugh. "I am grateful for what you have already done, and shall be equally so for whatever you may hereafter bestow on me."

"Spoken well, Ted!" cried the Squire, extending his hand, which the other grasped, while his lips muttered a curse. "But Ianthe, Ted? Win her, and you shall be my heir, indeed."

"That is a question, uncle, to which there are two sides," answered Edward Churchill. "To love Ianthe is not difficult; but to win her, yes. If she should happen not to care for me—who knows?—and how anxiously he said it!—"her heart already may be another's!"

"Tut! When she told me, as did her father in his letter, that she was alone, friendless? Bias her, force her inclinations, I would not for the world. That she is my adopted daughter shall not prevent her being her own mistress. All I say is, try. You are young, handsome, and often in her company. Your union would greatly please me for the reason I have stated. Well, what do you say?"

"What can I say, uncle, but that I will try," he replied perforce. "The result lays with Ianthe Heath, not me."

"Thank you." And again the Squire pressed his hand. "Recollect, faint heart never won fair lady. Hush! here she comes!"

As he spoke, Ianthe appeared on the terrace, advancing toward them.

"The Squire is going to introduce me to one of your Eastshire celebrities, Mr. Churchill," she smiled.

"So I hear—Crazy Blair."

"He certainly has a craze," put in the Squire. "The poor fellow's brain is too powerful for its owner's limited range of education and experience to master. He is ever on the verge of wonderful discoveries, but never crosses it."

"Is he young?" inquired Ianthe, as they moved to the terrace steps.

"He is fifty; a widower, with one child, a daughter—his safety-valve against insanity. He adores her; she is as the very apple of his eye, as she deserves, for she is beautiful, and one of the steadiest, best girls in the village, though for years she has lacked a mother's care."

Edward Churchill had dropped a step behind, not joining in the conversation. His head was bowed, and he struck at the gravel with his cane.

At the foot of the steps he parted from them, saying jestingly: "Take care, Miss Heath, that Crazy Blair does not blow you up during your visit!" Adding, as he went, to himself, "I wish he would, the whole lot of them!—for some such event alone seems capable of getting me out of the fix I am in. I must wed Ianthe Heath, or, in all probability, lose Ravenhall. It's a shame. Whatever the Squire may say, I had a right to expect it to be mine. I'll go and consult the widow. Somehow, I don't know why, I wish that Ianthe were not going to see Mary Blair. Perhaps Mary may not be at home."

But she was at home, and opened the door of the cottage, adjoining the forge, that stood under a large spreading chestnut, to the left of the village green, at once to the Squire's knock.

"Good-morning, Mary," said Squire Ravenhall. "Is Blair at home? I looked in at the forge, but he was not there."

"No, Squire; I fancy he is in the workshop. Will you walk in, and I will see."

Ushering them into the neat little parlor that possessed a swing bookcase, well supplied with volumes upon engineering, steam, etc., she left them. Outside she paused, pressing her hand to her heart. Remembering the tie that bound her to Edward Churchill, she was always nervous in the presence of the Squire. Then she hastened down the passage to the workshop beyond.

"What a lovely girl!" remarked Ianthe, directly they were alone.

"Miss Blair is the acknowledged belle of the village!" laughed the Squire. "It's a miracle to me she is not married; but I do not even hear that she has a lover. That is the fault of over-education."

"How do you mean, sir?"

"Why, Blair's wife was a superior woman for her class; while poor Blair himself holds education as the pure gold of the earth, and nothing would content them but that Mary should be well taught. The consequence is she has been raised out of her own sphere, without the power of entering another."

The blacksmith entered, and Ianthe regarded him curiously as he saluted her with an inborn courtesy.

He was of the middle height. Iron-gray hair fell over a broad, knotty forehead. His well-formed features were begrimed by the forge fire, as were his hands; yet Ianthe was struck with his appearance. There was the dignity of thought—of brain power about him; but the vague expression of the large, clear blue eyes seemed to betray how terribly the brain was consuming itself, equally with the unconscious movement of the muscular hand across the forehead, as if to summon back memory.

Ianthe thought of the Squire's words—"Blair's daughter is his safety-valve from insanity;" and turned toward the girl.

She was standing modestly by the window. Leaving the Squire, who was giving some di-

rections to the blacksmith respecting repairs required at Ravenhall, Ianthe approached her.

"What a pretty garden you have!" she remarked. "Can it be that that is a bignonia on that trellis? It grew over our house in Jersey, but I did not know the English climate was warm enough for it."

"This thrives well," replied Mary, timidly; "but then father takes such care. It's a relief to him when he leaves the forge. We have a fern that no one else can get to live, but it does here; father, you see, is so clever."

"Of that I am sure," answered Ianthe, more and more taken by her companion. "May I see your garden?"

"Certainly."

Quitting the room, the two were soon walking side by side down the well-kept paths, their skirts scattering the perfumes of the flowers as they passed.

Their walk and talk was interrupted by the Squire's voice summoning his ward.

"My visit's all too short," smiled Ianthe. "You must allow me to come again; and if you will let me have a specimen of that fern, I shall be delighted."

"Ianthe, Ianthe!" remarked the Squire, shaking his head after they had left; "I perceive you are a terrible Radical! You have inherited your father's revolutionary ideas; you actually shook hands with Mary Blair."

"A condescension I paid not to the blacksmith's daughter, Squire, but to intellect. She is far cleverer than I!" laughed Ianthe. "Do you know Mary Blair is quite a botanist? She knows, too, all the Latin names of the flowers, and that I could never acquire. Ah!"

The exclamation was hardly audible; but the quick start accompanying it did not escape the Squire. He looked round.

"What is the matter, my love?" he asked.

"Nothing. That is, did you notice a gentleman just now, standing by yonder stile?"

They were proceeding down a broad country road, bordered by high hedges and arched by trees.

About twenty yards in advance of them was a stile, leading to the meadows.

"I did see some one," replied the Squire.

"Did you know him? Ted, perhaps?"

"It was not Mr. Churchill," said Ianthe; and her tone was lower, her color a trifle heightened. "But the figure seemed familiar to me. It was like some one I knew abroad."

"Not a Nihilist, I hope?" laughed the Squire.

"No, indeed! Pray do not think so ill of me, or of those I knew," rejoined Ianthe. "Though I fear, unless you object, sir, I shall be Radical enough to improve my acquaintance with Mary Blair."

"I shall not object, my love," remarked the Squire. "I have not the slightest doubt, if we were judged by the standard of brains, Blair would be found a better man than I. But about the mysterious figure that vanished so rapidly; for I see you have not forgotten him?"

Ianthe had not.

Her glance had furtively been trying to penetrate the thick hedge, but in vain.

They had now, however, reached the stile.

Going to it, both looked over. No one was to be seen.

"He's vanished, truly! You will not be able to see if it was the person you believed."

"It was not; for had it been, he surely would not have disappeared. Besides, it is not at all likely that he could be in Eastshire."

They proceeded on their way until they reached a small lane full of deep cart-ruts, diverging from the road, when Ianthe said, halting: "Did you not say, sir, that you particularly wished to see farmer Styles this morning?"

"Yes, I must call upon him; but I will see you to the lodge gates first."

"Pray do not think of it!" cried the girl. "Why, they're almost in sight. Surely I can go that distance unescorted? You will pain me, sir, really!"

"In that case I yield. Perhaps I may overtake you before you reach the house."

Waving his hand, he turned down the lane.

Ianthe pursued her way more slowly. The expression of her countenance was changed. She was lost in thought.

"I could have declared it was he," she reflected. "Yet, how possibly could he be here, and why should he not speak?"

Just then there was a quick step following her. She fancied it was the Squire; but, on turning, started, with a little cry of joy, recognizing the gentleman she had seen at the stile.

"Then it was you, Mr. Glendenning, that I saw!" she exclaimed, impulsively, extending her hand. "I thought I could not be mistaken."

"Yes, it was I, dear Miss Heath! At last I am happy enough to speak to you."

CHAPTER V.

A SACRED CONFIDENCE.

"How strange that you should be in Eastshire as well as I, Mr. Glendenning!" remarked Ianthe, recovering her composure. "Why did you not speak to me just now?"

"You were not alone," he answered, passing over the first part of the sentence. "I would not intrude."

"It would have been no intrusion. It was my guardian who was with me. One of the best, the kindest men that ever lived."

"Indeed!" remarked Mark Glendenning, a sneer on his lips which he checked in his tone. "Is he also related?"

"Not in any way."

"That is well!" said Mark Glendenning, fervently, beneath his breath.

"He was an old college friend of dear papa's. Ah!" exclaimed Ianthe, stopping abruptly, "you do not know—I have not told you—though perhaps you may have guessed from my dress."

"I know of your sad loss, and have grieved for you," he said, quickly, with ready sympathy. "I arrived in Jersey the day you left. I was informed of everything."

"And you—"

"Came here," he interrupted, looking at her—they had been walking slowly on—"to see you—to say how sorry I was—to ask if there was anything I could do for you, Miss Heath. You can but know how glad—how honored I should be if there were!"

"You are very, very kind," she replied, in a low tone, her gaze bent on the ground. "Heaven indeed has sent me true friends in my sorrow. I thank you so much!"

"Then I am neither to be glad nor honored?" he smiled. "There is nothing I can do for you, Miss Heath?"

"Nothing. I almost wish there were, for I'm sure that would please you best."

"Indeed it would. Do you recollect when I saved your little dog that had got into the whirl of the tide round the headland, and could not make the shore?"

"How could I forget it?"

"Well, it was not a very heroic deed," he laughed, lightly; "but I look back on it as the happiest event of my life."

It was an embarrassing speech to answer. Ianthe feared to do so seriously.

"I thought you a hero!" she laughed. "Ah! I have no little dog now. Poor Fluffy died of a fit, I fear brought on by an inordinate love of eating. Do you intend staying in Eastshire?"

"I hardly know," he rejoined. "I can scarcely tell, so much depends."

"If more important business should not call you elsewhere, I fancy its beauties would repay you—you who sketch so beautifully," she remarked.

"That is true," he smiled. "Already, I assure you, I have seen enough, Miss Heath, to make me in no hurry to depart."

Whether she did not understand his real meaning, or whether she deemed it best to ap-

pear not to do so, Ianthe rejoined, "I am sincerely glad of that, Mr. Glendenning. Then you will let me have the pleasure of introducing you to my guardian, Mr. Ravenhall? I am certain you will like him, and that the liking will be mutual."

"Many thanks; but I fear that is a pleasure I must decline. My circle of even acquaintances is a small one, yet I do not wish to increase it. If I may see you occasionally like this—if I can ever be of any service to you, and you will permit me, you do not know the boon you will confer."

She looked at him perplexed, wondering. He perceived it, and, with a nervous laugh, said, "You are surprised! You regard me as eccentric. What can I say or do to remove the impression?"

"If you desire to remove it—I mean my wonderment that you refuse a simple introduction to my guardian," smiled Ianthe—"why, the truth is ever the best to be said."

"Is it always?" he responded, in a voice so seriously interrogative that again she looked at him. Then, as with sudden determination, "Miss Heath, you are right; let me confess it. It was to tell you and your father the truth that took me to Jersey, where I learned of your melancholy loss, and came here to express my sympathy. But why not still tell the truth? Why should I not? I have a history—a sad one. I am sure, Miss Heath, you would hold it as a sacred confidence not to be revealed to those nearest and dearest."

Ianthe moved somewhat, and slightly nervous at the tone the conversation had taken, answered, "I would, indeed, regard the confidence in the light you say. But why is it necessary at all?"

"Why?" he repeated. "Because, until you know, my presence is a deceit practiced upon, if not an insult to you. Because I may not now again take your hand, may not ask the countenance of your friendship until you have learned the truth. Will you hear it, and then be my judge?"

"Your judge, Mr. Glendenning?" she said, nervously; "why should I fill such an office?"

"Because, for no other's judgment do I care! Do not refuse, Miss Heath! Give me the comfort of having one who probably will not refuse sympathy, to confide in. Do not reject a confidence that had your father lived would have been his."

Ianthe paused. Perhaps her companion was not aware how strong an advocate he had in the girl's own heart.

Finally, glancing up, she said, quietly, "Mr. Glendenning, I will accept it in my father's name! But surely this place—the open public road—is not suitable? Here is Ravenhall. Will you not enter it?"

They had reached the handsome lodge gates by this time, and she motioned toward them.

Mark Glendenning drew back a step.

"I would rather not," he remarked. "We might not be more free from interruption there than here. Bear with me in my eccentricity, Miss Heath," he added, with an effort to smile; "but even the boundary hedges of an estate as large as this seem to press on one at times like prison walls. Do you see this lane? It leads, as you know, toward the river. There it is improbable that any one would disturb us. Dare I ask you to walk in this direction?"

"Why not? It will do as well as any," remarked Ianthe, moving forward.

"Thank you," he said, so earnestly, even gratefully, that it thrilled her to the heart.

The path was somewhat rough, yet Mark Glendenning did not offer his hand to assist his companion's steps. He knew she would prefer it otherwise. They walked in silence side by side, each one's thoughts on the other. Suddenly Ianthe Heath stopped.

"This is far enough, is it not?" she said.

"Quite," he responded. "See, under this tree is a felled trunk. Will you sit down? It will be more comfortable for you. I will make my recital as brief as may be."

She took the seat, her feet buried in the soft,

mossy grass, enameled by daisies and bluebells. She could not help being struck by the strangeness of her position, but she had no fear of her companion, whose manner was marked by an almost reverential respect.

Mark Glendenning then taking his place near her, standing, one arm leaning against a tree, his handsome countenance grave, and indicating considerable emotion, he began in low, clear tones, over which it was evident he kept great control.

"The confession I must make, Miss Heath, I throw myself on your generosity to pardon. I feel how trebly wrong of me to touch on the matter when your loss is so recent. Yet I am sure you will recognize that circumstances offer an excuse. You remember how we first met; how we met again and again. You cannot estimate how delightful to me was your and Mr. Heath's society. I called it friendship, yet not for long. Very soon I knew it to be love—that all the world held no being so dear to me as were you!"

Ianthe, flushing painfully, made a movement as if to rise.

"This, Mr. Glendenning, is scarcely the confession you led me to expect," she remarked.

"Wait—I entreat you: wait!" he exclaimed, touching her arm lightly. "Pray hear me to the end! Why I have said this is but to show you why I tell you my history. That you can ever be anything more to me than a friend. Miss Heath—that I should ever dare to hope, ask it, is impossible. There is a barrier between us—I know it. I would tell it you that—that you may not misunderstand me when I ask for your friendship; and that you will think of me now and then! It is"—he paused, undergoing an internal struggle; then the word came like a whisper through his clenched teeth—"disgrace!"

Ianthe started, then looked at him with pitiful sympathy.

He was very pale, and it was very evident that he was suffering deeply.

Instinctively she extended her hand, saying, "Not through any fault of yours, Mr. Glendenning—of that I am sure."

"No, indeed, no! Thank you for those words!" he rejoined, gratefully pressing the slender fingers. "When I knew I loved you, I remembered this disgrace, and fled your presence. Uselessly, I returned; but honor was not all lost to me. I dreaded—pardon the presumption—that I might not become indifferent to you, and forced myself from your presence again. To live, however, without ever seeing you I found to be impossible, so I came to a resolve. The history of my life, which I had learned from a dying mother's lips, had never passed mine to a living soul. I determined that it should to you and your father. Before you I would appear under no false colors. Then I thought that you, when I had disclosed all, would accord to me your friendship, without misreading mine or fearing that I should venture to overstep it."

Mark Glendenning pausing, Ianthe said, "My father liked you much, Mr. Glendenning. He, as I, esteemed your friendship. Believe me, nothing you can say will lessen my regard."

He took the words as they were spoken. He never dreamed that, in arousing a generous girl's sympathy, he was the more surely winning her love.

Ianthe's whole heart seemed to go forth in pity to her noble, handsome companion.

"It will make me happy indeed if it should be so, Miss Heath. I will delay my recital no longer."

And then, with many changes of feeling from anger to bitter grief, he related his history.

She listened in earnest sympathy and compassion.

Her lip trembled, and tears hung on her lashes, when the son, telling of the mother's death, burying his head on his arms, crossed against a tree, sobbed aloud.

When Mark Glendenning recovered himself,

he said, "You see now, Miss Heath, the barrier that holds me back from ever daring to hope for more than your friendship. I have told you all."

"And, Mr. Glendenning, I thank you for your confidence," she answered, gently. She had risen, and now held out her hand. "Your poor mother—it is *her* story, I believe?"

"It is her story, Miss Heath, that is true. She was an angel: but the world would not—nay, does not read it so."

"And"—she paused, then substituted for the word she had been about to use—"him? Have you ever met?"

"But once."

"And then?"

"He was wealthy, honored, prosperous."

"He knew you?"

"How was that possible?" faintly smiled Glendenning. "We meet as strangers. No word of mine shall ever make it otherwise between us."

"But is this right? I would force him to listen—I would force him to repent, and—" said Ianthe.

"Would repentance bring back the dead?" interrupted Glendenning. "No; his path runs one way, mine another. Even were they parallel, and the intervening space but small, I would not cross it."

"I think you are wrong," she said, gently, though much in secret admiring him. "Yet yours is a hard cross that he has given you to bear. Not, however, too heavy, I trust, for friendship to lighten. You shall never find mine changed."

"That is all I wanted—all in this world that I care for," he remarked, as he touched his lips to her hand.

The action was not without a witness. At that moment Edward Churchill, chancing to be coming up the lane, saw it through the trees. He had been in consultation with the widow, during which it had been arranged, chiefly, it must be owned, by Mrs. Mortimer's subtle suggestions, that Mary should be informed that her marriage was no marriage, and that Edward should at once pay his addresses to Ianthe.

Even to the young man, the widow's partisanship on his side had been a trifle surprising; but what is so easily deceived as vanity? Edward Churchill imagined that Mrs. Mortimer was actuated purely out of friendship to himself, while, in fact, her motive power was revenge, and he whom she pretended to serve was but the instrument she used.

Her meeting with and cutting reception by Ianthe Heath had aroused all the widow's worst qualities. She was certain that the girl would acquaint the Squire, at least, with the truth of her widowhood; and when she said that she would ruin Ianthe, meant it as no idle threat. Edward Churchill had himself shown her the way.

The minister who had performed that secret union had, it had been ascertained, joined a missionary expedition into South Africa. For Mary Blair ever to discover him would be impossible, as she had been ignorant of even his name. Thus the poor girl was helpless.

Yet Mrs. Mortimer meant her by no means to be the sufferer in the end. Ianthe once married to Edward Churchill, it was her plan to find the clergyman by secret means, keeping herself in the dark, to inform Mary and her father of the truth, and bring about Ianthe's disgrace, and Mary, the blacksmith's daughter's exaltation to the rank of Mrs. Edward Churchill as a thorn to the Squire.

In her own mind the plot was clear, and with great skill she manipulated the strings she held. Even that morning Edward Churchill had, he hardly could have said how, save by his own reasoning, become morally convinced that his marriage with Mary Blair, though one in honor, was not so in law; and that regarding himself in the light of a hardly-used individual whose generosity and softness of heart had caused him to fall into the snares of a pretty low-born girl, he had every right to free

himself from a connection so detrimental to his future.

He had quitted Mrs. Mortimer, therefore, with the full intent of at once laying desperate siege to Ianthe's heart, having small fear of success, when, happening to lift his eyes, he had halted from astonishment at beholding, through the trees, Ianthe's tall, graceful figure and that of a remarkably handsome man, who, with marked deference, was kissing her gloved hand.

"Who the deuce is he?" he muttered. "I never saw the fellow here before. He's no stranger to her, though! Meeting in this secluded lane looks mysterious! Those high and grand girls can manage a little secret flirting on their own account, it seems! Can the fellow be an old lover? He looks it. Then I suspect he'll be poking his confounded nose in at Ravenhall! I wish I could hear what they are saying."

And for that honorable purpose diverging from the path, Edward Churchill strove to approach them through the trees.

But his purpose was prevented by Ianthe and Mark Glendenning quitting the lane. At the Ravenhall gates they parted, the latter down the road, the former entering the Ravenhall avenue.

On the terrace she met the Squire, with his dogs.

"Why, where have you been wandering, my fair maid," laughed the Squire, "that I should reach home first?"

"I met an old friend, sir."

"Not the man we saw at the stile?"

"The same. He did not like to address me then, seeing that I was not alone. He is an old friend—one whom papa esteemed greatly."

"I hope, my love, you told him that he would be welcome at Ravenhall?"

"I did, sir, take that liberty, but I am doubtful if he will avail himself of Ravenhall hospitality, as his stay in Eastshire is uncertain. See," she smiled, "we have all arrived at home together! Here comes Mr. Churchill. I'll go and remove my hat. Luncheon must be nearly ready."

When Edward Churchill joined the Squire he said, "Has Ianthe told you who was the young fellow she was speaking to in the lane?"

"Yes; an old friend."

"Friend!" laughed the nephew, shortly.

"In confidence—mind, in confidence—he was kissing her hand, and looking things unutterable. I fear, sir, I shall find a rival in my wooing."

"You intend to woo, Ted?"

"Yes, uncle. Why should I not own it? You took me by surprise this morning, and I didn't like to say the truth downright. It would have seemed as if I only said it out of selfish, mercenary motives, to secure Ravenhall. But I do love Ianthe, and should consider myself fortunate if I could win her."

"I am delighted, Ted!" cried the Squire, putting his hand on his nephew's shoulder.

"Ah, sir, but this new 'friend'?"

"Is no more than a friend. Certainly he cannot be a lover, for Ianthe asked him to Ravenhall, and he refused to come, his stay here being short."

"I am glad of that!" responded Edward Churchill, who had a dread of Mark Glendenning's rivalry.

CHAPTER VI.

CRAZY BLAIR'S INVENTION.

"No, no, Edward, you don't mean it—you can't! Think—it would kill me! Say you are but jesting! It would be cruel, but I'd forgive you!"

The speaker was poor Mary Blair. With a brutality the outcome of nervous, shame-faced guilt, Edward Churchill had carried out Mrs. Mortimer's suggestion, and, seeking an interview in the old rendezvous among the willows, had told Mary she had been deceived. The ceremony, as the clergyman, had been but a mockery, that had apparently made them man and wife.

She had listened at first, too stunned to believe, even if she understood.

In that very spot, where the graceful willows, casting their delicate branches into the water, made little mimic eddies in the tide, how often had Mary listened to Edward Churchill's fervent whispered words of love; and now, could it be that the same lips uttered such fearful sentences?

The poor girl stood gazing wildly and with rapidly-blanching cheek and lips before him.

Then when she noted his expression—how it never softened, how no smile appeared, how his look never met hers—a fear stole into her fond heart, and, throwing herself on her knees, clasping his hand, she had made that piteous appeal.

"Get up, Mary," rejoined the scoundrel, plucking away his hand, and, perhaps to protect its recapture, thrusting it into his pocket. "I'm deucedly sorry—I really am! It isn't quite my fault. What could you expect?"

"What expect?" exclaimed the unhappy girl. "What, Edward, had I a right to expect? That you were speaking truth; that you, a gentleman, could not, would not, deceive one that you, as you said, so fervently loved, who so fervently loved you! Had I not a right to believe you?"

"A gentleman! There you've hit it, Mary," he broke in, seizing at the merest straw of wordly extenuation, however base and cowardly. "Not only am I a gentleman, but the heir to my uncle Ravenhall. Then how could I really wed you, Blair, the blacksmith's daughter? Your father's a very clever and worthy man of his class, and you are deucedly pretty and nice, and I do love you—yes, I do!—but we hardly could be man and wife. You must see that?"

She had not risen from her knees but in that humble position looked up at him, as, with face averted, his trembling voice came over his nervous lip. And, as if forced to expend his irritable anger on something, he savagely crushed a cluster of daisies beneath the heel of his boot.

"My father!" said Mary, in low, separate syllables as if that part of his speech alone had riveted her ear. "Do you know what he would do, if what you say is true, and he learned what you have made me, his daughter? He would kill you!"

Edward Churchill started, and his color for a moment changed. Crazy Blair was certainly not one to be trifled with, especially where Mary was concerned. But, like most men, Churchill felt that he might trust in the love of even the woman he deceived. He answered, with a sneer, "You mean he would waylay me—knock me down—shoot me, Mary? And that, I suppose, would make your heart happy, as it would avenge you?"

"Happy! Your death, and by my father's hand, cause me happiness! Ah, how little you know the depth of a woman's love! Had you, Edward, never—never would you have so basely, so cruelly deceived! But"—with a quick change of manner—"I even now cannot believe it. It is too unreal—too terrible! You are testing my affection! Your words prove it, Edward—dearest Edward! You wish to see what I would say and do. As if I could harm you, or let others injure you! Smile, Edward! Say, love, I am right? Let me once more feel your arms about me!"

She clung to him in her touching appeal. She tried to smile up at him, though blinding tears flowed down her pale cheeks.

Freeing himself, he drew a step back; full of dogged determination.

"It is true," he remarked; "and whatever I might say couldn't make it different, Mary. I tell you, I'm sorry, but that can't mend matters now. The marriage was no marriage. All the laws of England couldn't make it one."

Mary rose to her feet, and stood erect; she was calmer, but very pale.

"I'll not believe it, Edward. At least, I'll try!" she said.

"Try what?"

"Whether there is no law in England that will right me."

"You, Mary!" he ejaculated, with sudden uneasiness. "I thought you said your love was so great you could not harm me."

"And would that?—to make you, Edward, what you have professed to be—my husband?" she rejoined, gently. "You yourself say you are sorry for the past."

"Sorry, Mary, that I deceived you; but I couldn't have married you. Can't you see that? My uncle would never have looked upon me again. Whatever I can do for you, I will. Whatever you ask in reason—"

"Stay; not another word!" exclaimed Mary Blair.

Her bosom rose and fell with quick pulsation, her white lips trembled, but her voice was steady and calm.

"Up to this hour, Edward Churchill, I have been your wife! Not for one moment will I be your—"

Her voice failed her; she dared not trust it. Had she proceeded, her tears must have flown forth.

He did not break the silence, but still kept thrusting his heel upon the crushed daisy.

After a space, Mary continued: "But I have said I will not believe it, and I will not. How can I tell that you, who confess to having the heart to deceive, are now telling me the truth?"

He cursed her beneath his breath.

"You'll find it is so," he rejoined, doggedly.

"Then the law must tell me it is as you state, Edward."

"What!" and he glanced quickly in alarm at her; "you would declare your disgrace to the world?"

"Would it be my disgrace or yours?" she replied, yet in the same quiet tone. "I would leave the world, Edward, to judge between us. Did you think I would bear my misery in silence? Had I been alone, I might have fled somewhere to hide my disgrace—even there," and she pointed to the river; "but I have a father. You tell me that I have brought dishonor on his name"—again the poor girl's voice faltered—"yet he shall know it was in ignorance, that he may not curse me!"

"What! you would confess all to him?"

"Why not?" Is he not now the only one who loves me?"

"Confound it!" he muttered; then aloud, "Your tone has much changed since the commencement of this conversation, Mary."

"It has. I'll tell you why, husband—for husband I believe you are. I have guessed your secret."

"My secret?"

"Yes. You love Miss Heath, or would wed her, and so desire to be rid of me. That is why I will not believe your word—why I will ask the law to right me."

Try as he did to prevent it, this direct, truthful accusation produced a change in Edward Churchill's countenance.

"What absurdity!" he exclaimed, with averted glance. "You are mad!"

"No," said Mary, slowly shaking her head. "Since her arrival, you have changed; and now comes this. I do not blame her; how could I? She is good and beautiful; but she knows nothing of this."

"Supposing your wild supposition were true?" put in Edward Churchill. "Say I did love her—that doesn't make her love me."

Mary gave a little mocking laugh.

Poor girl! this man had been her deity, and she could not but suppose he must be so to any woman.

"I must go," she said, moving a step away. "I ought not to have come, for my father may need me. To-night's work, he says, is to see the result—the success of his long toil."

"Stay, Mary!" he exclaimed, following, and placing his hand on her arm. "How are we separating?"

"As we met," she replied, sick with misery and despair. "As man and wife."

He shrugged his shoulders.

"Well, look here!" he remarked. "We'll let matters stand as they are at present, eh? Promise me you'll say nothing to any one—not even to your father—about—about this until we meet again, Mary?"

"All rests with you," she responded, in a low tone. "I shall be in no hurry to give pain to one I love."

"Then I'll see you in a day or two's time. As I said before, I'm sorry for this—I am indeed. Good-by! Won't you take my hand?"

"I cannot!" she answered. "I never will again, Edward, unless it be as my husband's."

She went from him up the slight, grassy incline, and disappeared among the trees.

Edward Churchill looked after her with a brow as black as thunder.

"Well, I'm in a pretty mess!" he muttered. "I would never have believed she was a girl of that spirit. If she tells that mad father of hers, I'm done for. I must consult Mrs. Mortimer; but I know what she'll say—'Brave it out. The marriage can't be made a marriage.' That's all very well, but she doesn't know the Squire. He'd have no blot on his 'scutcheon nor his heir's neither. Besides, Ianthe—she has talked of nothing but Mary since she saw her. Dared I speak of love, she'd send me to the right about at once."

So thinking, he proceeded at a quick pace toward the widow's villa.

Meanwhile, poor Mary hastened homeward.

All through that last sad hour she had kept a control over her feelings that had surprised herself; but now Edward Churchill's presence was removed, she feared that she must break down before reaching the seclusion of her own dwelling.

Grateful for the darkness of the approaching evening, she finally reached the gate of the cottage.

The forge was not closed yet, but it was empty, and the fire merely sent a dim glow around.

Her father was, as she had guessed, in his private workshop at the back.

All the week he had been busy, almost through the night as well as day, at his invention, and now was he to know the result—whether failure or success?

Crazy Blair, in his own mind, had no doubt which.

Going softly into the garden, Mary looked through the small panes of the workshop window.

Yes, there was her father, in leathern apron, and with grimed, strong, yet nervous hands, at work.

The furnace was alight. Crazy Blair's broad, dark brow was contracted by intensity of interest in his work; his iron-gray hair was flung back.

There was something striking in the man—the dignity, the beauty of mental power.

As Mary looked, Blair threw up his brawny arms, as if in exultation; his visage lighted up with triumph, a joyous smile was on his lips.

The girl cowered back with a stifled sob.

"Oh, how shall I ever tell him? How can I blight his happiness—his faith in me? It will break his heart! Oh, Edward, Edward, that all this misery should be your work!"

She crept to her room, and there, throwing herself on her bed, found relief at last in tears. She had seemed brave before Edward Churchill, but in her heart she had not been. She had declared that she believed herself his wife, that he was deceiving her by saying otherwise. Yet she could not but ask herself whether he would have dared to state that if it had not been the truth.

The night darkened around her. It was black enough in the garden, lightened only by the red glow of Crazy Blair's furnace. Mary was unconscious of the course of time. Her brain had given way for the moment beneath her fearful suffering; instead of unconsciousness coming to bring her relief, her thoughts were cruelly active. They made her temples feel as if heavy weights were pressing on them.

Thought followed thought; and once she became aware as one waking from sleep, that she had been laughing hysterically, for she caught the echo in the room.

Nearly three hours had so passed when Mary leaped up on her bed, scared, bewildered, but sensible. Something had roused her. A fearful sound—a violent report that had shaken the cottage to its foundation, accompanied by a clatter of broken glass.

What was it? Thunder? It was loud enough for the word's coming to an end. Would it come again? All was silent. What could it have been? Then something of the truth forced itself into her stunned brain. With a shriek, starting up, she ran to the window.

"My father!" she cried.

There was the red glow of the furnace, fiercer, brighter. And in the garden beneath a volume of white smoke or steam issuing from the workshop window. The window! It had gone; the panes, the frame had disappeared, leaving but the square opening through which the furnace glare and smoke or steam were coming.

Mary turned sick with dread.

Then, thinking only of her father, she darted down the stairs, calling upon him, wildly. Running through the tiny passage to the door leading into the workshop, she threw it open.

What a sight presented itself! The place was on fire! The furnace coal was scattered around. Flames leaped up and ran along the ignited wood. Smoke, lurid as with life, rolled over the ceiling. Mary stood as one paralyzed; to move was impossible!

The hot smoke rushing toward her probably brought her back to consciousness. Where was her father? Wildly she glanced around; then, with a cry sprung forward.

The blacksmith lay extended on the floor, a deep cut on his temple.

Was he dead?—had he only been stunned? Mary did not stay to ascertain. Frenzied by love and terror, she seized him by the shoulders, and, with a strength fear must have given, dragged him into the little passage. Then closing the door, she ran to the front one of the cottage, opened it and filled the dark, silent night with her cries for help.

"What is the matter?" inquired a gentleman passing.

"My father!" gasped Mary. "The workshop is on fire! Save him! Oh, in mercy help me!"

She dashed into the house again; and Mark Glendinning—for it was he—followed.

Together they got Blair out into the little front garden, in which neighbors, eager to render aid, were rapidly assembling. Their first thought was to extinguish the fire, passing running comments on the cause, such as, "Guessed all along how it would be!" "This comes of new inventions!" "Crazy Blair, indeed!"

Mary neither saw nor heard any thing around her. Throwing herself on her knees by her father, she had gazed at him eagerly. Then, with a piercing shriek, "He is dead!—he is dead!" she cried, and fell insensible across his body.

It was at this moment that a brougham halted in the road; and its occupant, a lady, letting down the glass, inquired the cause of the crowd.

"Only crazy Blair, 'um, blowed hisself up, and set fire to his place!"

"Do you mean that some one is hurt?" said the lady, who was no other than Mrs. Mortimer.

"I think Blair's done for hisself, 'um. He looks as if he's dead. His poor daughter's in a fine takin'."

The widow instantly alighted.

"Where are they?" she said. "Take me to them, my good man."

As she made her way through the crowd, she encountered a gentleman doing the same, for whom, however, every one made a passage.

"Ah, Doctor Gray!" she remarked; "this is very sad. I hope Blair is not hurt seriously."

Let me come with you; I may be of use to his poor daughter."

Soon the doctor was kneeling by the blacksmith.

"This wound is a most serious one, I fear," he said, after a rapid examination. "The skull is fractured, and I suspect whatever has done it is yet in the wound. Some of you fellows fetch a hurdle or a shutter; the poor man must be taken to the infirmary, and have instant care and attention."

Mrs. Mortimer, who had had an interview with Edward Churchill that evening, had been leaning over Mary, her mind thronged by thoughts that would have astonished the admiring spectators, who, as they saw the widow, in her rich evening dress, kneeling by the poor girl, blessed her for her charity.

"And this unhappy child," she remarked, raising her head, as the doctor concluded, "I will take care of her. She, too, will need attention. Will some of you kind people assist me to carry her to the brougham? I intend to take the poor thing home with me, Doctor Gray," she added, "where she can be well nursed; and if you will look in at the villa after leaving that unfortunate Blair, I should be obliged."

"I will not fail, madam. I honor you for your charity. The girl may, indeed, need a friend; for I fear much this wound of her father's may have a fatal result."

Hands, rough but gentle, placed poor Mary in the brougham; and, the widow seated by and supporting her, they were driven home.

"This may turn out a most fortunate chance for our plan—or, I should say, for my plan," reflected Mrs. Mortimer. "If the crazy blacksmith die, Edward Churchill will have nothing to fear in that quarter; while as to this girl, while I have and can keep her under my roof, I will take care she shall not balk me of the revenge I am determined to have on you, Ianthe Heath! It shall one day be my turn to pass you as you did me—with cold, haughty disdain!"

When the news of the sad occurrence at Crazy Blair's reached Ravenhall, Ianthe rose up quickly.

"Poor Mary!" she exclaimed. "Oh, dear sir, may I go to her?—may I bring her here?"

"Of course—certainly, my love!" said the Squire; and Edward Churchill grew white with alarm.

Mary, his wife, beneath that roof, nursed by Ianthe Heath!

His terror was quickly allayed by the next words of the footman who had brought the news.

"If you please, miss, Mrs. Mortimer was passing at the time, and took Mary Blair home in the brougham with her."

"Well done!" remarked the Squire to himself, a little ashamed of the hard things he had said of the widow. "My love" (to Ianthe), "this, indeed, proves that there are good and charitable sides in every one's character. I shall go down, though it is late, and get the latest intelligence respecting the state of poor Blair."

CHAPTER VII.

NEWS FROM AFRICA.

THE explosion at Blair's had not a fatal result; but it was, nevertheless, serious enough.

The fracture of the skull was so severe that it was likely to keep the blacksmith a month, if not longer, at the infirmary. And the double shock of that sad night had told greatly upon poor Mary.

Brain fever had set in, and when that left her, and strength came slowly back, Doctor Gray's fears were unfortunately realized. Her reason was in abeyance—he would not say gone. The future alone could prove whether her senses would be restored. She had forgotten everything; knew no one.

It was as though she were beginning a new life, where all was strange. She was gentle, passive as a child, and, Doctor Gray affirmed, did not suffer.

"You must remember that, Blair," said the Squire, kindly, when he broke the news to the distracted father. "It must be your consolation that she is happy. You must watch tenderly over her, and give up inventing for a time. You see what comes of it."

"Don't talk like that, Squire—you, a man of sense," broke out the blacksmith. "Mary shall be my first thought in all things, poor darling! But it was not I—it was my poverty to blame;" and he clenched his knotty hands. "I had to work with inferior materials. They couldn't resist the pressure. Yet what would this world be if a man had turned faint-hearted at his first failure? No," he cried, vehemently; "if I live, I'll succeed yet."

Then he sobbed passionately as he exclaimed, "Oh, Mary, my poor child, never have you been dearer to me than now!"

Crazy Blair and Mary found the warmest compassion in every heart save two. Those two, it need hardly be stated, were Edward Churchill's and Mrs. Mortimer's.

The one saw himself freed from any fear of Mary making public that secret marriage; while the other perceived the greatest obstacle to the success of her plot against Ianthe removed. Let the latter once be wedded, and she had no doubt of finding a means to prove, without showing her own hand in the matter, that Edward Churchill was legally the husband of Mary Blair.

"But," had said the young gentleman, when the widow had advised him to lose no time about the wooing, "suppose Mary regains her senses?"

"That will be years," responded Mrs. Mortimer, making a decided assertion, for which she had not the slightest foundation, "if she ever does, which I and Doctor Gray both doubt. Ask him if you like; though, if you take my advice, you had best avoid showing interest in the matter. In your case, you had better be charged with coldness than give rise to the slightest suspicion."

So two months went by. Crazy Blair had returned to his cottage, which, owing to the strenuous efforts of the neighbors, had only partially suffered in the destruction of the workshop. There also came poor Mary. It was a painful moment to the father. The girl knew the house, and mechanically, in a silence that she rarely broke, went about her ordinary duties; but she did not know him. The mind was void. Only one person could at all influence it—Ianthe Heath.

Deeply touched by the poor girl's affliction, Ianthe visited her constantly, and tried to interest her about her favorite ferns. During these periods she would now and then find Mary's look fixed on her in a strange, thoughtful way, while she would press her hand to her head as if to stay, or make clearer, some thought that was troubling her brain. But it generally ended in a sigh, as if the effort had been useless.

"Poor, poor Mary!" reflected Ianthe, after one of those visits. "Why should I mourn at my lot when I see hers? Yet is not oblivion of the past and indifference to the present and future sometimes a blessing?"

These two months had brought a trouble to Ianthe Heath that she had found it cruel to bear and hide. Mark Glendenning had gone, suddenly acquainting her of his departure, only after he had left, by a letter she had been unable to understand, save that it was possible they never again would meet, as he thought of going to South America.

"DEAREST MISS HEATH (the letter ran),—

"You will be surprised, though, I trust, not offended, to learn, on receipt of this, that I have already quitted Eastshire. I feel that I ought, even out of common civility and the friendship with which you have honored me, to have made my adieux in person, especially as it is improbable we may ever meet again; but—I trust you will comprehend me—I dared not. I might, losing self-control, have said that which one in my position has no right to say, and really offended you, though you are so generous and kind. There are, I believe, more madmen in the world than asylums contain. I, perhaps, was mad ever to have come here. Yet no; for I have told you my history, and won your sym-

pathy. What else had I a right to win? The knowledge that I possess your friendship will be my consolation, my support, in the land to which I am going—South America. New scenes may procure for me the repose I could never hope to obtain in Europe. I shall make South America my home, for it is my present intention never to return; so surely I commit no wrong when I ask you to think of me sometimes? Soon, no doubt, you will be a happy wife. To believe that you remember me will be an exquisite pleasure.

"Yours, with a sincerity passing friendship,
"MARK GLENDENNING."

In her own room Ianthe had read this, and her tears had blotted the page. Why had he gone—gone with such singular abruptness? What were his antecedents to her? He himself was good and honorable. She loved him—she would have wedded him!

She was in despair. She could not even write to him. He had given no address. No; as he had said, the parting was forever.

"I soon a happy wife?" she murmured. "Never! How could he believe it? Surely he must have seen how dear he was to me! Why should he have pained me by saying that?"

Ianthe Heath was perfectly unaware that, owing to the skillful innuendoes of both Mrs. Mortimer and Edward Churchill, every one in Eastshire was of the same opinion as Mark Glendenning, that her marriage with her guardian's nephew was a settled matter, only, owing to the very recent loss of her father, the arrangement was not made public. Even the Squire unconsciously aided the conspirators by—when friends hinted their suspicions that such a union was probable—remarking, "Who can tell?—who can tell? Nothing, I can assure you, would give me greater pleasure."

These rumors, declared to be certainties by his informants, had reached Mark Glendenning.

He had never dared hope to call Ianthe wife. Yet the intelligence came like a blow.

When calmer, however, he recognized that it would be no longer honorable to meet Ianthe as he had, possessing the feelings that he did.

Only now that she was, as he thought, to be another's did he find, not merely how intense was his love, but that there had been hope ever in his secret heart.

Following one of those sudden impulses that had taken him from her presence twice before, he wrote the letter which has been mentioned, and the same night started for London, unconsciously leaving the field open to his rival; of which circumstance Edward Churchill as unconsciously availed himself.

His attentions to Ianthe grew daily more marked, and were apparent to all but the girl herself, absorbed by her own trouble. Hence her passive acceptance of them led the lover, and the Squire also, to imagine that she regarded them not unfavorably.

"Poor Heath's death is so recent," remarked Squire Ravenhall, "that you cannot expect Ianthe to act as other girls under less sad circumstances, my dear boy; but she loves you—I am sure of it!"

"I hope so, sir; but—" began the nephew.

"But—tut, tut! True love is ever nervous, Ted!" laughed the Squire.

"That's true, sir; yet, whenever I draw near at all like 'popping the question,' whether it is anything in Ianthe's look, or what it is, for the life of me I cannot get a word out."

Squire Ravenhall laughed heartily; then said, "My dear Ted, you could not have given a better proof than this that you have never loved before." (His nephew winced, and pulled his mustache nervously.)

"There are very few men that have not felt as you do. We hear of Herbert having proposed to Ethel; but Ethel herself doesn't even know how many attempts and failures Herbert had made before he got the words well out. Take heart!"

"There's yet another thing, uncle; her father's death being so recent—"

"Six months ago, quite, Ted."

"Then you think I might propose without offending her?"

"Quite according to how you do it, my boy. You see, your living under the same roof, in every-day communication, makes the matter

different. Without even a right-down set proposal, you might discover her feelings toward you."

The conversation was taking place in the library.

Rising, Edward Churchill in silence walked to and fro a few moments. He was nervous, but, poor Mary had nothing to do with it.

The Squire watched him, half-amused. The nephew lately had turned over such a very clean and nice new leaf, that he had won much upon the Squire's good opinion.

"He's a handsome fellow!" reflected the uncle. "His glass should give him confidence. Tut! Ianthe will never refuse him. Yet I like to see his doubt; it promises well."

Coming back to the table, and resuming his seat, Edward Churchill said, "I've been thinking, uncle. Ianthe regards you as a second father. What might pain—I will not say offend—her from me, would not if it came from you. She might consider me unfeeling, precipitous; you she would merely regard as solicitous."

"You do not mean, Ted, for me to propose to her?"

"No, no, sir," was the quick response; "I thought if you would feel the way—if you would let her know how much, how very much I love her, only that I dread to intrude upon her sorrow! How very much, too, you would like such a match!"

The squire drummed with his fingers thoughtfully on the table, and his nephew watched him closely.

"I don't know that you are not wise in that suggestion," said the elder at last. "It displays a delicacy of feeling that cannot fail to touch Ianthe. I'll do so—and no time is like the present; see, here she comes!"—pointing through the open window toward the girl, who, clad in melancholy sables, was advancing across the lawn. "She has been visiting poor Mary Blair. The only change that comes to the poor thing, they say, is when Ianthe is with her. You had better go, Ted; I'll speak at once, if there should be an opportunity."

Edward Churchill rose and quitted the room. He had lost his color, his limbs were possessed by that nervousness which generally seized them at the mention of Mary. He alone knew that there had been something added to the shock of the explosion that had deprived her of her reason.

As the door closed on him Ianthe appeared at the library window, and perceiving her guardian, entered.

"Well, how did you find Mary?" asked Squire Ravenhall.

"Better, sir, I am sure—decidedly better," replied Ianthe, putting off her hat and taking a seat near her guardian. "Once to-day, just for a second, I am certain I detected intelligence in her gaze."

"Do we not at times in most mad people's, my love?"

"Ah, but Mary cannot be called mad. Besides I did not observe this before—only to-day—so it must be an improvement."

"Let us hope it is so," said the Squire, his mind engrossed by quite another matter. "But let us leave Mary Blair for awhile. I want, my dear Ianthe, to speak to you upon a matter which interests me greatly."

She looked quickly up at him, wondering.

"I trust you will not consider the subject ill-timed," he proceeded. "Remember my age. Months to me, Ianthe, are as years to you. Life is always uncertain; no one can count surely on it at any time, and less than ever after passing their meridian. Days fly swiftly then."

"Oh, Mr. Ravenhall—dear guardian!" exclaimed Ianthe; "I hope you have no cause—"

"To think death is near me?" put in the Squire, with a laugh. "No, indeed; yet he only is a wise man who sets his house in order and prepares for it."

"Surely, dear guardian," smiled Ianthe, "you need little preparation. Your nephew, your heir—"

"My love, it is your future as much as his that occupies me," broke in the Squire.

"Mine, sir! Indeed, you are most good; but—"

"I love you as a daughter, Ianthe," again put in the Squire; "and I, being yet strong and in health, shall probably see you a happy wife before I die—that is what you think? Well, it is that very hope which occupies me. I would like to see that happiness secured to you, my love; it may be."

She looked up at him, nervous, surprised.

"Surely," he smiled, "you cannot have been blind to what every one else has seen, Ianthe?"

"I—I do not understand," she murmured.

"I refer to my nephew's sincere love for you."

"Oh, no; impossible!" she cried; then quickly turned aside, but the Squire retained her hand.

"Nay, nay—I trust not," he said, gently.

"Ianthe, I have startled you. Perhaps I have been premature, considering your loss; in that case blame me, not Ted. A feeling of delicacy, of fear to intrude upon your sorrow, has held him mute, and when I urged him to speak, he entreated me to plead his cause; as an old friend of your dear father's you might listen to me without offense."

"How, dear sir, could I be offended with you, to whom I owe so much?" murmured Ianthe; "but what you say—"

"Do not answer without consideration, Ianthe," remarked the Squire. "You cannot tell how I have set my mind upon this. To see you and Ted married would complete my happiness. And he loves you devotedly. Ianthe, I have vowed to take your father's place in regard to you. It was not an idle vow; it is my intention to carry it out in its full sense. If I die, I make you, as my adopted daughter, mistress of Ravenhall."

"Oh, sir," cried Ianthe, turning quickly, "I could not, would not permit it. Your nephew—"

"Shall not be left unprovided for, though I confess he will be disappointed. As to not permitting it, my love, wills cannot so easily be set aside. At present mine is unmade, a delay I intend at once to rectify. Before now it would have been rectified, but for this hope, that, as my nephew's wife, together you might inherit my wealth. Ianthe, will you think of this? Will you try, for my sake—nay, for poor Ted's, to say yes?"

The girl sat silent, with drooped head.

The Squire, regarding her, little imagined that her thoughts had flown far away across the broad Atlantic. How could she wed another, loving Mark Glendenning?

She looked up to answer, but her heart failed before the anxious expression of entreaty on the Squire's handsome countenance.

"Is Ted indifferent to you?" he said, gently.

"No, sir. How could he be that? Have I not experienced every kindness from him? Will you—will you give me time to consider?"

"Assuredly, my love! This is not a matter upon which I would hurry you! Name your time—a week?"

"No, sir; I—I ask but until this evening!"

Ianthe had not to inquire whether she really loved Edward Churchill or not. She liked him, thought him handsome and worthy, but love was not hers to give.

The question she had to answer was—Could she sacrifice herself for those who had been so kind to her? The idea of her inheriting Ravenhall was repugnant, yet she knew that the Squire could so will it without power of hers to pass it over to his nephew.

And what did she sacrifice by pleasing the dear old Squire, her father's friend? Only her own feelings, for had not Mark Glendenning left her—gone forever? Never again would they meet!

Bitter and long was the struggle Ianthe passed through. Finally, pale, exhausted, she decided. What was the future to her? That happiness for which she had hoped was im-

possible. Why injure that of others? Should she not, when the mistress of Ravenhall, feel almost bound to wed Edward Churchill, whose rightful place she had usurped. Would she bring pain and dissent between those two who before her coming had lived as father and son?

The Squire was on the terrace with his dogs when Ianthe Heath joined him.

"Dear guardian," she said, her slender fingers on his arm, "would my saying 'yes' really give you pleasure? Is it your wish?"

"It is, indeed, Ianthe! Nothing, my love, could delight me more, if you can say yes of your own free will."

"Then I will wed your nephew. Only—only, you do not wish it to be very soon? I could not while—" Her eyes fell on her dark dress.

"Ianthe, your time shall be ours," cried the delighted Squire. "Your wish, my love, our law."

He warmly embraced her; then, as she entered the drawing-room, went to find Edward Churchill with the good news.

When the young man sought Ianthe half an hour later, raising her hand to his lips with a tenderness and respect that touched her, he said, "I was a coward, Ianthe, to intrust my cause to another, but you have made me the happiest man on earth. I will try to prove worthy the honor you do me."

"And I," murmured Ianthe, in a low tone, "will seek to be to you a true and faithful wife!"

Before a week was over all Eastshire knew that a *bona fide* engagement had taken place between Ianthe Heath and Edward Churchill, who was much flattered by the almost extravagant delight and congratulations of Mrs. Mortimer. On his own part, his self-congratulation was unbounded. He already regarded Ravenhall as his, when one morning a letter, the postmark "Pietermaritzburg," re-aroused all his terrors. With trembling fingers he tore it open. His fears were realized. It was from Sydney Cargill—he who had performed the secret marriage between himself and Mary Blair.

It stated that the writer was about starting for England, owing to an uncle's most seriously failing health, and that, during his stay, he, Sydney Cargill, hoped to be able to pay a visit to his old college friend, Edward Churchill, at Ravenhall.

CHAPTER VIII.

WEDDING BELLS.

Two months had passed since Ianthe's acceptance of Edward Churchill, and the anxiety and fears of the latter respecting the return of Sydney Cargill had somewhat abated. He had received a hurried letter from the young clergyman, announcing his arrival in Glamorganshire, and stating that he had found his uncle in so precarious a condition, recovery being hopeless, that he must defer his visit for some while, as he could not leave for even a day.

This letter brought immediate relief to Edward Churchill. He hoped even that Ianthe would be his wife before Sydney thought of coming, for Ianthe had consented to a quiet union, at the expiration of her twelvemonths' mourning. Then they should be abroad, and he could put the young clergyman's visit off altogether, and by letter lead him to believe that Mary Blair was dead.

Ianthe Heath gladly would have postponed their union to an indefinite period, but again sacrificed herself to her guardian's wish. The Squire had been slightly ailing, and openly expressed his anxiety to see her his nephew's wife.

"I have made no will yet," he remarked, smilingly, as the three sat together. "What is the use, when I shall have to alter it? And what is the use at all, when you and Ted, save bequests to my old servants, will inherit all jointly?"

So Ianthe, too listless, too indifferent to re-

sist, yielded. How could a few months make a difference to her?

Not even a line had she had from Mark Glendenning. She did not even know where he was.

Mrs. Mortimer waited the union with as great impatience as did Edward Churchill. The arrival of Sydney Cargill in England had given her exceeding satisfaction, for he was ready to her hand. When she met Ianthe Heath, and exchanged their customary distant bows, a smile came over to the widow's red lips, for she felt her vengeance was almost as good as accomplished. Indeed, everything seemed to promise favorably. Even in the case of poor Mary Blair, Mrs. Mortimer had, by displaying a sympathy which had won her much praise, kept a careful watch over the girl, and had come to the same conclusion as Ianthe Heath, that Mary's reason was slowly but surely returning.

"Let them once be married," reflected the widow, one morning early, as she drove her little pony-carriage from Blair's cottage, "and I do not mind how soon the child is herself again."

Mary, after Mrs. Mortimer's departure, had resumed her place by the window. It was open, and the soft, warm, bright sunny morning breeze came in across the flowers ranged on the sill.

Her reason being dormant, had prevented any feeling of care and trouble; thus, in bodily health, Mary had not much suffered. Her form was rounded, a delicate color was on her pretty cheek; only the wistful, vague expression of the large clear eyes told the mental deprivation. But that apparent effort to catch passing thoughts in their flight, to summon back memory, was very frequent now.

Suddenly, Mary, raising her head, listened attentively. There was a sound in the air, filling the place with music—the music of church-bells that rose and fell, now loud and vibrant, now low and flowing on the breeze. The girl, as entranced, leaned forward, drinking in the sounds.

"Ah, listening to the bells, Mary?" exclaimed a neighbor, pleasantly, as she passed the palings of the little garden. "They're nice, ain't they? They are wedding-bells. Why, there's a big marriage to be to-day. You ought to go and see it; it would do you good—rouse you a bit."

Mary's pretty face made no response, and the woman went on, murmuring a compassionate "Poor soul!"

But the girl had heard the words, and gradually they worked their meaning into her brain.

"Marriage!" she repeated, in a vague tone, drawing back and pressing her hand to her temples. "Marriage—she said marriage! I was to go! But it can't be mine! No, no, no; mine—mine—There were no bells. It wasn't day. There were candles. No; not mine. Whose is it? Why ought I to go?"

The word had awakened a sudden train of thought, a memory of the past. But at present the weakened brain could not grasp it, to piece link by link together. She leaned back, shaking her head as if the effort was useless. But the words would not leave, they haunted her. They forced themselves into her ears with the ringing bells, and again and again, with petulance, she repeated, "Marriage—marriage! Whose? Why did she say I ought to go?"

Abruptly link by link of the past returned to the stunned brain, bringing connection, reason, and Mary sprung from her seat with a cry. She had remembered—it had come back to her—the cruel scene that had first made her reason totter; the interview with Edward Churchill down by the river, where he had tried to make her believe she was not his wife, and she had accused him of desiring to cast her off that he might marry Ianthe Heath.

"That is it!—that is it!" she cried. "My husband is marrying her! That is why the woman said I ought to go. I ought to be there to stop it. It must not be. No no! How

can Edward have two wives? I must go—I must go! He is my husband—mine!"

Mechanically, but hastily, she put on her cloak and hat, and quitted the cottage. No one saw her. Crazy Blair was in his workshop, and the villagers were at the church to see the wedding, the bells for which were yet making the air musical.

Mary, however, engrossed by the one thought, seemed no longer to hear them. Neither did she make her way to the church, but directed her steps to Ravenhall. Swiftly she went, never swerving right nor left. The carriage gates were open, and she passed through.

"Goodness gracious me!" ejaculated the lodge-keeper's wife, hastening to the door. "It's poor Mary Blair!"

But Mary paid no heed. Quitting the avenue, she crossed the lawn, toward the house.

In the morning-room Ianthe was seated with the Squire. Chancing to look up from her drawing, she saw the girl approaching.

"Look, dear guardian!" she exclaimed, rising in surprise. "Can it be possible that yonder is Mary Blair?"

"It is, indeed! Whatever can bring her? I trust her madness has taken no worse phase!"

"Oh," remarked Ianthe, "if her reason has but returned!"

Advancing to the window, she called the girl, who had ascended the terrace step, and on her coming, drew her gently into the apartment.

One glance at the dilated eyes showed reason had not yet resumed its throne.

Clasping Ianthe's hand, Mary gazed round with a half-scared, half-frightened expression.

"Where is he?" she whispered—"where? He is not here."

"Who, dear Mary?" asked Ianthe, softly.

"My husband!"

"Your husband!" ejaculated Ianthe, in amazement, then looked to the Squire.

He had risen, drawing away from them. Sadly he touched his forehead.

Mary, apparently, did not see or heed him.

Clasping Ianthe's arm more tightly, she proceeded.

"Yes, yes! I know he loves you, now, instead of me. He wants to marry you, but he cannot have two wives—can he? I heard your wedding-bells—hark! there they are—and I came to save you! I like you; you are kind to me, and—and I wouldn't have harm come to you; and—and tell me—" Her expression grew fretful, as if the thought were slipping from her. "I—I don't understand; but would it harm you if you were to marry him, while I his wife, was living?"

Ianthe's eyes were full of pitying tears as they looked into the sweet, pretty face turned questioningly to hers.

"Oh, is not this sad!" she murmured, in an aside, to the Squire.

Squire Ravenhall's countenance was dark, his brows knit.

He signed to Ianthe to question her visitor.

"Who is your husband, Mary?" she said.

"Don't you know? But how should you?" with a faint laugh. "He told me I must tell no one, not even my father, and we were married in secret. And, oh, I was so happy! I loved him so much—so very much! I do love him still, though he never comes near me now. You see, you came; you were handsomer—better than I; so that he wanted to marry you, and told me it had been all a deceit—I wasn't his wife. But I know I am. Am I not?" And, pleadingly, she gazed into Ianthe's face. "Therefore, he cannot marry you. That is what I came to say; and—and you will stop the marriage-bells, won't you? You will not wed him now you know?"

"No, most certainly, my dear Mary," said Ianthe. Then to the Squire, "Oh, sir, there sounds truth in what she says!"

"I fear there is only too much truth," rejoined the Squire. "Ask the villain's name!"

"Mary," said Ianthe, "you haven't told me your husband's name."

"Haven't I?—no. I thought you knew. It is Edward—Edward Churchill, the Squire's nephew. He told me not to tell; but unless you knew, how could you know whom you were not to marry?"

"I believe, indeed, that this poor child's story is really true," said the Squire, stepping a little nearer. "Even a mad brain could not put such a one together."

"Then, is Mary Edward Churchill's wife?" exclaimed Ianthe.

"Not that. I could the more easily forgive him if she were."

"Then, dear guardian," broke in Ianthe, with crimsoning cheek, "I could not! Has he not dared to offer love to me? Think if Mary had not spoken!"

"Ah! at the moment, I forgot that!" rejoined the Squire, with indignation. "I was absorbed by the sorrow of this poor girl, whom, evidently, he has basely deceived by a mock marriage—"

"It was no mock marriage!" cried Mary, suddenly turning upon the speaker, her listless apathy gone. "It was true—true! We were married in a room—not a church. I had no bride's dress; the bells didn't ring for me; but the words were the same. Who dares say he is not my husband? Look—look!" and from around her neck she drew a little silk bag. "Here is my ring! I hung it next my heart, because he said I must not wear it. It's true—I tell you, it's true!"

Quickly she turned from Ianthe to the Squire as she spoke, and chanced to glance out of the open window that commanded almost the whole length of the terrace. A cry, wild, yet full of delight, burst from her lips.

"And there—there is the clergyman who married us!" she exclaimed. "Ask him! He will tell you—he will tell you!"

She moved forward, but her strength, already overtaxed, gave way, and she dropped insensible on the carpet.

Ianthe flew to her assistance, while the Squire, looking in the direction Mary had pointed, perceived a gentleman in the garb of a clergyman ascending the terrace steps.

"Oh!" he cried; "Edward Churchill is a scoundrel, indeed; for surely here comes confirmation to this poor child's words. It is Sydney Cargill, a friend of my nephew's. Not another moment shall elapse before this is fully explained."

Stepping onto the terrace, he hastened to meet the guest, and led him back to the room. As Sydney Cargill's gaze rested upon Mary, whom Ianthe was tenderly supporting, he started, and drew back.

"Mr. Cargill," said the Squire, gravely, "is it true that, during your late visit here, you performed the marriage ceremony between my nephew and this poor girl?"

"Mr. Ravenhall," replied the young clergyman, "I hardly know how to answer you. It is a question you should put to Mr. Churchill."

"And do you think, sir," rejoined the Squire, scornfully, "that I should get truth from him?"

"How?" ejaculated the clergyman. "He does not deny it?"

"Apparently so, sir, since he has wooed my ward, and in a few months might have led her to the altar, but for this poor girl's statement. Mr. Cargill, as a clergyman and a man of honor, I demand and expect the truth from your lips."

"You shall have it, Mr. Ravenhall, after what you stated, and I hold no promise binding with your nephew," responded the young clergyman, indignantly. "When last here, Edward Churchill requested me to do him this service. I refused, not liking the secrecy of the matter, and aware of the difference in his and Mary Blair's social position. He, however, entreated me, and, as a final argument, told me it was to save the poor girl's character. Mr. Ravenhall, I yielded then, and wedded them."

"Do not think I blame you for that, sir," and the Squire held forth his hand. "You did right. Then this young girl is—"

"Edward Churchill's lawful wife."

There was a pause, a temporary silence, during which it would have been difficult to divine the thoughts of the three. Ianthe's were gratitude for the escape she had had, and ineffable relief at the knowledge that she was free.

The stillness was broken by the door opening, and Edward Churchill's entrance. He came in hurriedly, but stopped, surprised at seeing his friend. He did not at once perceive Mary.

"What!" he exclaimed; "you here, Cargill?"

"Yes, sir," answered the Squire, sternly, motioning toward Mary. "And your wronged, unhappy wife! How dare you, scoundrel that you are, place foot beneath this roof? How dare you? Go, and never cross this threshold again! From this moment you are to me as a stranger!"

Edward Churchill had turned red, then of a white, livid tint. He seemed about to speak, but his pale lips refused to form words.

Turning, he dashed from the room. Recalling the groom who was taking away his horse, he rode from Ravenhall.

As the Squire saw him galloping down the avenue, he said to the young clergyman, "Sir, you will have to regard me as your host during your stay. My nephew shall never return!"

"Mr. Ravenhall," replied Sydney Cargill, quickly, "my visit this time is to you, not your nephew. I bring you a communication from the dead!"

CHAPTER IX.

SHOT IN THE BRIDLE-PATH.

FOR some brief time Edward Churchill rode recklessly on, urging his horse to its fullest speed, while, in a stunned, fierce way, he kept heaping curses on Sydney Cargill.

Of course the discovery must have come through him. Cargill had revealed everything, and he, Edward Churchill, was ruined!

On the crest of a hill, crowned by a group of trees, he finally arrested the speed of his panting horse. Turning, he looked back at Ravenhall.

There it lay in the bright sunshine, its roofs rising from a sea of verdure. Only a few days ago he had regarded it from the same spot with the elation of a future possessor, and now it was lost forever!

Yet was it lost?

When he had cast off Mary Blair, he believed that the ceremony had flaws in it, which, in law, could release him, set him free! Had not that been the widow's idea also?

Why had he fled so precipitately, confessing thus guilty intent? Why had he not braved it out? Should he go back and explain? Even as he reflected, he knew perfectly well how useless was the reasoning.

Did he, could he even prove the marriage no marriage, it would make no difference to the Squire. He had acted a villain's part, and never again would he be allowed to place foot in Ravenhall.

"Which, by all the laws of justice, is mine by inheritance," he muttered through his teeth, as, his horse secured to a tree, he lay in the long grass, his haggard gaze directed to the home lost to him forever. "I am his nephew, his own sister's son, yet he would rob me for Ianthe Heath! What is she to him? If he had been but fair—if he had not put that idea of marriage in my head, this would never have been. It's all his fault, not mine. Ah! if only he had died before that girl had come across his path!"

He was silent, but his thoughts ran on, growing wilder, more despairing, more fiercely beyond control.

He cursed every one, especially "the creeping informer," Sydney Cargill; even Mrs. Mortimer—every one but Mary.

Strangely he wished her no ill; suspected not that the truth had come from her lips.

The sun passed the zenith, and began to

decline. Yet Edward Churchill still lay under the tree—his gaze on Ravenhall.

But his ideas had taken a new and dangerous turn. There was a white, set, desperate look on his face. Some time back a thought had entered his head, which had held possession ever since, strengthening and enlarging under the bitter sense of that which he termed injustice.

If the Squire was dead, by inheritance Ravenhall must be his, Edward Churchill's, for the Squire had made no will.

Sometimes the white, set expression of the young fellow's countenance seemed to relax—it might have been with fear; but one glance at Ravenhall, one remembrance of his penniless future, brought it back.

The hour was about four when, arising abruptly, and mounting his horse Edward Churchill rode now at an ordinary pace and with his ordinary outward expression into the neighboring town, drawing rein before the chief hotel, where he had a room, and kept a change of dress and a few other things for his own particular purposes.

Alighting and entering, he requested the waiter to bring him information when the next train departed for London, as he had to go by it.

When the man brought him the intelligence, which Edward Churchill had known before, that it left at 4.50, he found the young gentleman finishing packing his portmanteau.

"Then I have no time to lose," he said, rising. "It is important that I should be in town to-night. Let some one please bring this portmanteau with me."

A porter was summoned, who raised it on his shoulder, and started, Edward Churchill following. Reaching the station, he said to the man, "Give the luggage to a porter, and have it labeled; then come to the waiting-room. I'll pay you."

The man complied, and Edward Churchill held him in conversation until the train came in and then took his place in a smoking carriage.

He had paid the man well, and, in respect, he stayed until the train moved away.

But Edward Churchill did not proceed to London. He alighted at a bustling junction nearly twelve miles away, and at about eight o'clock stood once more in the Ravenhall grounds. A felt hat was now pulled over his forehead, the collar of a long coat turned up about his ears, while he appeared, by keeping among the trees instead of on the bridle-path, desirous of escaping observation.

Why was he waiting there, his back against a tree, his arms folded, his chin on his chest, never moving?

The church clock struck nine, half-past, ten, and he had not altered his position. Soon after the last hour, however, he bent forward, listening intently.

Some one was advancing along the road. The footfall came nearer. A spasm twitched Edward Churchill's pallid features. Soon, the man—for the step told it to be so—was in view; merely an outline in the dark, but recognizable.

It was the Squire returning from the Rectory, where it had been his custom every Thursday, for the last ten years, to dine and have an hour's backgammon with the rector. But there had been no backgammon that evening.

The Squire's lawyer had been summoned for the morrow, and the Squire had visited the Rectory to request its master to be one of the executors to his will, at once to be made.

As he passed, Edward Churchill bent still more forward, and his hand clutched something in the long grass at his feet. It was a gun. A moment after, its report rung through the air, and, with a quick, sharp cry, the Squire throwing up his arms, fell face forward on the path.

Was he dead? Edward Churchill knew he was a good shot, yet—suppose—if not? Dared he ascertain? Already had he made a step for-

ward, when he was startled by the sound of crashing bushes at the opposite side, and a moment after a man sprung into the path.

"The keepers!" hissed Edward Churchill through his teeth, as he fled.

"A gentleman, miss, wants to speak to you particular," said the footman, nervously fingering the handle of the drawing-room door.

"A gentleman at this hour, Francis?" remarked Ianthe, amazed, raising her eyes from her book to the clock marking ten minutes to eleven. "Has he sent no name?"

"No, miss; but he is quite a gentleman, and says you know him."

"It is singular. I wish the Squire were here; he is very late," thought Ianthe. Then, aloud, "Show the gentleman in, Francis."

Then, with a cry of surprise, she advanced, exclaiming, "Mr. Glendenning! Is it possible?"

"My presence beneath this roof, Miss Heath, scarcely can astonish you more than it has surprised myself," he answered, pressing the hand she had extended with much agitation. "Why I am back in England, and in Eastshire, however, I must explain another time. At present a more important matter claims your attention. Mr. Ravenhall has met with an accident—"

"An accident!" cried Ianthe, her affection for her guardian making her forget even the joy she felt in again looking upon the man she loved. "Oh, what is it? It is not anything serious?"

"I hope not," was the grave response; "but a horse is being saddled, for medical aid is necessary."

"Ah, then, it is serious," cried Ianthe. "Tell me—speak!—where is he? I must go to him!"

"The truth is, whether intentionally or not I cannot tell, Miss Heath, he was shot as he came along the bridle-path."

"Shot!"

"I heard the report, which drew me to the spot, and found him on the ground. He still breathes. With some difficulty I found help, and he is now on the sofa in the dining-room; and I myself shall proceed for a doctor, that there may be no unnecessary delay."

"Oh, thank you!" said Ianthe, tears in her voice. "I will go to him."

"Yes; but be calm, I pray. Control your feelings. Remember the servants have only you to rely upon for directions."

"Trust me," she rejoined; and as Mark Glendenning hastened out, she entered the dining-room.

The Squire was on the couch, pale and still, and but for the hurried and temporary efforts Mark Glendenning had made to stop the hemorrhage, there was no sign of violence about him.

Kneeling by the couch, Ianthe, her tears flowing fast, pressed his hand to her lips as she cried, "Oh, dear friend, my guardian, my second father, whom all loved, who could have done this? It must have been accident. No one intentionally would harm you!"

"It's all them darn'd poachers, miss, that's what it is," remarked an old servant standing near. "The Squire always votes against the Game Laws, and won't punish the villains. And this is what comes of it!"

"They could hardly raise their hand against him for that, John. No, no!"

A weary twenty minutes' waiting, during which the Squire showed signs of returning consciousness. Then the medical man arrived, and Mark Glendenning led Ianthe back to the drawing-room.

"It is not a moment for me to speak of my own affairs, Miss Heath," he said, when he found her more composed; "but, as upon hearing the doctor's report I shall quit Ravenhall, I must explain now."

"Surely you will remain to receive my guardian's thanks?" she pleaded, with sinking heart.

"I did but perform an act of common

humanity—nothing more. You received my letter?"

"I did."

"Well, I started for my new home; but the ship I was in was wrecked off an island in the Pacific. The first vessel that came to our relief was homeward bound, and we had to return; but merely for a time. I shall depart again shortly."

Attentively she had watched him, and perceived the violent emotion he with difficulty could suppress, and that he never met her gaze.

"Mr. Glendenning," she said, quietly, "you once rendered me a service. I am about to ask another at your hands. Once you said that you would aid me should I need help."

"I have not forgotten," he rejoined.

"Then I ask you to remain. I ask you to support me by your presence and advice in this trouble that has come. I am alone, friendless once more, now that my guardian is ill."

"You alone—friendless?" he repeated. "Mr. Churchill—"

"I never regarded as the friend, I hope, Mr. Glendenning, to be allowed to consider you. And to-day, for a most shameful act, has he been banished from Ravenhall altogether."

"Can it be true?" he ejaculated, tremulously touching her hand—"can it be that your compassion, your pity goes so far as—Dare I—What am I saying?"

"Say nothing," she interrupted, in a low tone, her cheeks suffused by a delicate blush; only prove yourself my friend and remain."

"I will," he cried, "though not at Ravenhall."

Then he moved back from her; for, the door opening, Dr. Gray entered.

"What news? Oh, you smile!" exclaimed Ianthe.

"Yes, Miss Heath; with a cause. A doctor's countenance is the preface to his opinion, and his patients anxiously read it," said Doctor Gray. "I am delighted to say the Squire's wound is not at all of a dangerous nature. The ball fortunately glanced off at the shoulder-blade. In a few days he will be himself again. My message is to you, sir," he added, turning to Glendenning. "Mr. Ravenhall wishes much to thank you for your kind services."

A flush passed over the young man's cheek, which then turned pale. He appeared about refusing to comply with the request; but, glancing at Ianthe a second, he replied, coldly, "If the Squire desires it, I will go; but I have a request to make—that I may see him alone."

Doctor Gray gazed curiously at the speaker.

"I see," he thought. "This gentleman knows something about who fired the shot, and doesn't wish it to get chatted over by servants. Very wise, too. As you please, sir," he added aloud. "Follow me."

Mark Glendenning did so, halting outside the door of the bed-room to which the Squire had been removed. Soon Doctor Gray returned.

"You may enter, sir," he said. "Mr. Ravenhall is alone."

"Stay one instant. Do you assure me your patient is in no danger?"

"Not the slightest. To one of his hale and robust constitution, even the shock will be as nothing."

"Thank you."

And Mark Glendenning, entering the room, closed the door behind him.

CHAPTER X.

MARK GLENDENNING'S HISTORY.

THE Squire lay on the bed, his fine, handsome countenance, with its heavy, iron-gray mustache, relieved against the snowy pillow. He was pale; but a kindly smile was on his features as he regarded Mark Glendenning.

As to the latter, a strong, violent agitation possessed him when he saw the Squire; but by an effort overcoming it, compressing his lips, his gaze partly lowered, and taking a step nearer, he said, "You desired, Squire Ravenhall, to see me?"

"Not a very strange desire," smiled the elder man. "Considering what I owe you—

probably my life, for your presence must have scared the villain who attempted it—I wished to thank you."

"There is no need, sir. What I did, any other would have done, or I would have done for any other even more readily."

The Squire, knitting his brows, looked at this young man, who, cold, erect, stood so aloof.

"Pardon me," he said, "but your manner, as your words, are peculiar. We are strangers, yet you speak rather as if the service you rendered me gave you no pleasure."

"It did not," was the response. "I performed it as a duty."

"A duty? As that, I suppose, of man to man? What other could you owe to me?"

"None but what the world would easily absolve me from, Squire Ravenhall," proceeded Mark Glendenning, his manner changing to one rapid and vehement. "I, who, as you say, probably saved your life to-night, as a youth, once vowed to take it."

"You?" ejaculated the Squire, rising slightly on his elbow. "Who are you?"

"Let the name of the woman whose heart you broke answer you—the name of my mother—Josephine Woodleigh!"

The Squire gave a quick, sharp cry as he dropped back on his pillow.

"My son!" he ejaculated.

"Yes, Squire Ravenhall—your son. Your lips have owned it. The son you repudiated; the son you covered with disgrace, giving him shame as an inheritance; the son upon whom you have never looked till this moment! You comprehend me now when I say duty, and no kinder feeling, actuated me in the service I rendered you. Now, too, you will understand when I say this interview has lasted long enough; that I go, for the air that I breathe beneath this roof stifles me."

"Stay; I entreat—I command you! Yes; my son, whom I never till now have seen—whose name even I do not know. Listen," he proceeded. "Did it never strike you that you had heard but one side of a story, and that not mine?"

"I heard that of a dying mother."

"Even she did not know all. I acted precipitately, perhaps. Her guilt was—I should say—noting the crimson anger on the other's brow—"appeared so clear. Tell me, I entreat you, the story you heard from Josephine—my wife's lips!"

"I was not fifteen when my mother, having but a few days to live, told me her history—that you, Aubrey Ravenhall, heir to this place, were my father. We were living, for the sake of economy and my education, in a small German town. She told me how she had given you her love; that she married you, and in Italy passed with you eight months, the happiest of her life. At that period you had to go to Rome on business, leaving her at the villa. On the fourth night, at midnight, she was startled by angry words and a scuffle in her sitting-room, adjoining her chamber. Throwing her dressing-gown around her, she ran in, in time to see a man descend over the balcony, escaping the shot you fired after him. She ran to you in alarm, asking the reason. You cast her off, and charged her with the knowledge of the man's presence in her room. She denied it; declared it must have been some thief. She had never even seen the man."

"Well?" asked the Squire, as Mark paused.

"You, sir, proved he was no stranger to her. You declared him to be a former lover; one to whom she had given hope, before she met you. You accused her of having jilted him because you were a more wealthy suitor. You accused her of having every night been visited by this man while you were at Rome. That an anonymous letter, acquainting you with that, had caused your return."

"Well?"

"Your wife denied it. Declared that she had not seen the man since she had wedded you. She prayed investigation. You would hear nothing; you quitted the house. Next day you

wrote, saying that you would not disgrace yourself nor her by making her infidelity public, but offered her a separate maintenance. She returned your letter, and left your house forever."

"All that is true," said the Squire. "Now listen to my story. Your mother, my wife, was the only child of comparatively poor but worldly parents. When I first knew her, I was instantly struck by her beauty and amiability. I procured an introduction, and speedily grew jealous of a certain captain, who was ever in attendance upon Josephine, who evidently loved her, and was favored by her parents. The question was—Did she love him?"

"Before a month was over, I told myself 'No;' that it was I who possessed her affection; also that the parents had transferred their favor to me, and looked coldly on the officer. I shall not enter into minute details of the fierce hate and dark looks I received from the man whose place I had taken. I was too happy."

"Josephine and I were married, and finally took a villa a few miles from Rome for a few months. Business called me to the last-named city. Hardly had I arrived there than I received an anonymous letter. It informed me that Josephine had loved, and been as good as engaged to, the Captain before my arrival, when, by her parents' orders, she had been forced to jilt him, and pretend regard for me, her wealthier suitor. Did I wish to prove the truth of the anonymous information, I had but to return secretly to the villa, when at midnight I should see the officer climb the balcony of my wife's room, which he had done every night of my absence."

"I need not say I went. I saw the man enter. I followed, in time to arrest him as he had his hand on the handle of your mother's door. On perceiving me, he gave a long whistle and mocking laugh, and would have passed me. A struggle ensued, I stumbled, and he leaped to the balcony. Then he looked back."

"Idiot!" he exclaimed. "A woman may sell herself for gold; but her love will ever remain his to whom it has first been given!"

"I had a pistol in my hand. I fired; but he had swung himself over the balcony, and was gone."

"Now you have heard my story," concluded the Squire. "Was I all to blame?"

"No," responded Mark Glendenning, who had listened with much emotion.

"Only to-day did I learn that it had been a plot to destroy your mother's fair name, and ruin her and my happiness—a base plot concocted by the man, my rival, out of revenge. It was he who tracked us, and waited his opportunity. It was he who penned that anonymous letter. It was he who bade me return to the villa, and who, to make me believe, scaled and, for the first and only time, entered my wife's room."

"Curse him!" cried Mark Glendenning, or, rather, Ravenhall, raising his clenched hands.

"Hush!" broke in the Squire; "he is dead, and had repented. The confession of his guilt and my wife's innocence was brought to me this morning by his nephew, and is in yonder desk."

The young man moved quickly forward, and took his father's hand; but abruptly the Squire, rising, threw himself on Mark's breast.

"My son—my son!" he exclaimed.

Mark Ravenhall could not remove that handsome iron-gray head resting on his breast, nor the arms so fondly clasping him. His heart was softened; his tears flowed freely.

"Father!" he murmured.

The fact of Squire Ravenhall possessing a son spread like wildfire through Eastshire, causing more than a nine days' wonder, and a curiosity that neither the Squire nor Mark took upon themselves to satisfy, when the matter grew finally absorbed in the news of Mary Blair's marriage.

This the Squire took no pains to conceal. On the contrary, he regarded the girl as his niece openly, and sought in every way to as-

sist her and Crazy Blair, who was once more heart and soul engrossed by his inventions.

The dawning of Mary's reason had been more than transient. After that fainting-fit in the Ravenhall morning-room her senses came back slowly, and daily strengthened. Unfortunately, as they did so, care came in their train, and her health failed proportionately, much to the sorrow of Ianthe, happy now in her own love.

On the eve of her wedding, however, Mary Churchill wished to see her.

The girl's eyes were sparkling, her cheeks flushed with joy, her voice tremulous.

"I have come to say good-by, Miss Heath," she said. "Father and I leave Eastshire to-morrow early."

"To-morrow—leave Eastshire! Where are you going, Mary?"

"To my husband. Oh, Miss Heath, he has written! He owns me for his wife! He has asked my forgiveness! He is ill—very ill!"

"And you are going, Mary?"

"Going,"—and the wife looked amazed at the question—"of course. Did I not say that we start for France to-morrow? Ah, I see what you mean!" she added, rather sadly, but with deep feeling. "He was not kind to me once; but he is my husband, and, Miss Heath, I love him so dearly!"

"May he, dear Mary, prove worthy of such gentle devotion!" exclaimed Ianthe, embracing her. "But I must seek the Squire. You must say good-by, to him."

She hurried to find her guardian, to whom she told Mary's news.

"He has sent for her—he has acknowledged her as his wife?" cried the Squire, with much satisfaction. "Now I can forgive him. Go, my love; I will join you and Mary in a minute!"

When he did so, he held an envelope in his hand, directed to Edward Churchill.

"Mary," he said, "give your husband this, and tell him that not only do I forgive the wrong he did me on a certain night some time ago—he will understand,"—Squire Ravenhall referred to the attempt on his life; for never once had he doubted whose hand had sent the bullet—"but while he makes you a good husband, a similar check to that which this envelope contains—it is for a hundred pounds—shall be forwarded quarterly."

Mary coloring, hesitated.

"I do not know whether my husband might like to receive it," she murmured.

"Poor child!" thought the Squire. "She has more delicacy and honorable feeling in her little finger than he in his whole body." Then aloud, with a smile, "Take it, Mary! If my nephew should feel offended, he can send it back."

The check never was returned. On the contrary, Mary wrote a letter of thanks, with an address to which other remittances might be forwarded.

Many were the presents Ianthe heaped on Mary; then, with warm adieux, they watched her depart.

"How happy she is!" said Ianthe. "Who, to look at her now, would believe that Edward had so cruelly treated her?"

"My dear, nothing is so forgiving as the heart of a true woman. In her love, she forgets everything but the object of her affection."

"Is that really so, father?" said a pleasant voice by their side. "What say you, Ianthe?"

"It may be," she smiled, placing her hand on her lover's arm. "But, Mark, if an unworthy husband be so loved, how much more should he be who is worthy of a wife's affection?"

"A question, dearest, I trust our future may solve," he answered, gazing fondly on her.

"But fancy Crazy Blair going too!" laughed the Squire. "What ever will Ted do with him?"

Crazy Blair never made himself a matter of trouble to his son-in-law. Assured of Mary's happiness, he devoted himself to his invention, and this time with success.

The crazy blacksmith of the village was recognized as the man of genius in the great city. Friends aided him with means and advice; and when the active brain was stilled at last, Crazy Blair left a fortune and a name to his daughter.

This, however, was all veiled in the misty clouds of futurity when father and daughter quitted Eastshire. They were far away—indeed, near London—before Ianthe's wedding-bells broke out upon the air. The church was crowded, and, as the young girl passed up the aisle, leaning on Mark Ravenhall's arm, all declared never had there been seen so handsome a pair.

All save Mrs. Mortimer.

She was there in her place, smiling and amiable, but black jealousy and anger in her heart.

Her plans had been baffled, but her secret was her own. Not even her tool, Edward Churchill, had guessed what those plans had been. Thus she held her place in Eastshire society, and considered it politic, though against her will, to be present, and nerved herself to witness Ianthe Heath's triumph, that she might continue still that young lady's hidden foe.

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